

STORIES & INSIGHTS

Meet Carlos Pundik



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23 HOURS AGO

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We caught up with the brilliant and insightful Carlos Pundik a few weeks ago and have shared our conversation below.



Carlos, thanks for taking the time to share your stories with us today We'd love to have you retell us the story behind how you came up with the idea for your business, I think our audience would really enjoy hearing the back story.

It was early on when the pandemic first began that my partner Jonathan and I got stuck at home from our corporate jobs where our vanilla extracts idea came about. I love to bake, I grew up spending quite a bit of time with my paternal grandmother in her kitchen while I was a young adolescent watching and observing her prepare meals and traditional family recipes. While we were stuck at home I started baking quite a bit making my own homemade cakes and cookies and breads. I always took vanilla extract for granted thinking as long as it says vanilla on the bottle it was the correct ingredient but boy was I wrong! All vanilla extracts are NOT created equal!! Lol!

I noticed that the baked goods I was making were just ok tasting but no "oh wow" factor! So with the extra time on my hands and being in lock down mode, I began to look for a better pure vanilla extract that I could use in my baking and ordered three of the top rated ones on Amazon. I was still not happy because each of these top rated vanilla extracts contained other ingredients or additives that were still hindering the purity and taste I was looking for and wanted. I shared this discovery with my son Daniel who is an amazing Corporate Chef in San Diego, California and he said to do some research and maybe I can try making my own vanilla extracts! I began to research vanilla and vanilla extracts on line I found a bunch of youtube videos and did some binge watching too!

What I discovered was shocking and I realized I had been using vanilla extracts that were mostly synthetic and artificially made, loaded with chemicals, additives and so called "natural flavorings" I also had no idea that vanilla was so hard to grow and produce, that's a whole other story! The shocking part of what I discovered had to do with beavers and Castoreum which is secreted by the castor gland which is located very near to a beavers anal gland! This was the tipping point for me!!

I began searching for my own quality ingredients and experimenting and trying different varieties of vanilla beans that came from Madagascar, Indonesia, Tahiti and Uganda. This is where my youtube education and online research that I had done came in handy! I also learned that there were Grade A and Grade B vanilla beans and this is where "all vanilla beans were not created equal" clicked for me!

My kitchen began to look more like a science lab than a kitchen! I started with pint sized mason jars and gradually upgraded in size to half gallons! I experimented for about six months during which I had different strengths and vanilla bean varieties extracting. I opened my first half gallon which was one of the first batches I had made and the first thing I noticed after opening the mason jar was the amazing burst of vanilla aroma!! It was almost intoxicating but in a good way! and this is where "all vanilla beans were not created equal" clicked for me!

My kitchen began to look more like a science lab than a kitchen! I started with pint sized mason jars and gradually upgraded in size to half gallons! I experimented for about six months during which I had different strengths and vanilla bean varieties extracting. I opened my first half gallon which was one of the first batches I had made and the first thing I noticed after opening the mason jar was the amazing burst of vanilla aroma!! It was almost intoxicating but in a good way!

I bottled this first batch up into several small glass bottles I had saved so I can store the vanilla safely and have it for my own use. It was Christmas of 2020 where I had the idea to purchase some nice glass bottles and give the gift of Homemade Vanilla Extract as Christmas gifts to family and friends. I actually sent my son Daniel a few bottles first since I knew he would get the most use out of them. Daniel gave a couple of bottles to professional baker friends of his that ended up giving him very positive feedback about how great the vanilla was! Family members had the same reactions and after receiving such amazing feedback, Daniel said to me, Dad you need to market your vanilla extract, people are loving it! The rest was history! La Vida Vanilla Extracts was born!

Carlos, before we move on to more of these sorts of questions, can you take some time to bring our readers up to speed on you and what you do?

We want La Vida Vanilla to become the “REAL Deal” Vanilla for bakers, chefs, foodies, etc. Every bottle that we hand craft is its own unique creation and crafted by two hard working humans who believe in having a quality product that will make the biggest difference for cooking, baking and more!

We stand out because there are not very many people hand crafting good, pure vanilla extracts except the big box companies! We consider ourselves a small mom and pop business but with a big ego! We want to create hand crafted vanillas for the great taste and quality but also and most importantly to create an experience that makes a positive impact in the culinary space! We say that “Good Vanilla is hard to find” and we know this to be true!

What do you think helped you build your reputation within your market?

We not only hand craft our great signature vanilla extract, we also hand craft eighteen varieties of vanilla extracts and non vanilla extracts in small batches and this is what makes us so unique in this space! These include: Cinnamon Vanilla Extract, Lavender Vanilla Extract, Bourbon Vanilla Extract, Honey Vanilla Extract, Habanero Hot Vanilla Extract, Pineapple Vanilla Extract, Blueberry Vanilla Extract, Mandarin Vanilla Extract, Spiced Rum Vanilla Extract, Cafe Cubano Vanilla Extract, Coconut Vanilla Extract, “Dirty” Vanilla Extract (Raw and Unfiltered), Chocolate Extract, Strawberry Extract, Clementine Extract, Peppermint Mocha Extract, Spearmint Extract, Pumpkin Spice Extract.

We also recently introduced our Vanilla Infused Olive Oils which have been well received by foodies and these include our Vanilla Infused Olive Oil, Lavender Vanilla Infused Olive Oil and Cinnamon Vanilla Infused Olive Oil. This is yet another little leap for La Vida Vanilla in creating another delicious and quality oriented product to add to our repertoire!

Any advice for growing your clientele? What’s been most effective for you?

We currently have our online store and we are proud to ship all over the USA and we also bring La Vida Vanilla Extracts to local Farmers Markets and Pop Up Events throughout Broward, Palm Beach and St Lucie Counties. We plan to continue to expand our reach by participating in more markets and events throughout Florida and introduce and grow La Vida Vanilla Extracts. We are a sustainable business and only use organic ingredients and support and purchase from Fair Trade Farmers locally and abroad.

Contact Info:

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