

BUSINESS & REAL ES

BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

A World Of Olive Oil Arrives On Monmouth Street

BY EILEEN MOON

RED BANK – The clean design of the latest addition to Monmouth Street might at first lead passersby to assume that it is an art gallery, and that would not be entirely wrong, as the elegant interior created by Rumson designer Gerry Roper features wood carvings, pottery and imported glass from European craftsman.

But the central offering of Carter and Cavero, the sleek boutique that recently opened its doors at 19 Monmouth St., is olive oil, decanted like fine wine into bottles capped and labeled for each customer.

The 18 varieties of oil on sale at Carter and Cavero have traveled great distances for their debut on

Monmouth Street.

Golden and green, infused with sun, imbued with the flavor of thousands of years of olive cultivation, each oil is hand-picked by Carter and Cavero's olive oil experts to exhibit the finest qualities of the fruit.

There are flavored oils, redolent with the scent of garlic and lemon, truffle and tangerine. There are also fine vinegars that, mixed with a particular oil, blend to create a flavor entirely new.

The business is the brainchild of four partners, Chris Ortiz, Chris Walsh, Sam Berg and Cesar Calliga, with a little technical assistance from Berg's father, businessman Howard Berg.

Ortiz, Walsh and Berg are college friends who, with Calliga, an olive oil expert and international competition judge, seek to bring the selectivity of a fine boutique to the business of olive oil.

Ortiz, who grew up in Fort Lee, was essentially born into the business. His father was an importer of fine leather goods and clementines from Spain, the family's ancestral country. Ortiz's uncle owned an olive mill in a small town called Cazorla, in the center of Jaen, which Ortiz describes as the "center of the olive oil producing universe."

Ortiz's father had been born there, and Ortiz spent many summers of his childhood there surrounded by olive groves. "I was always interested in olive oil," he said. "I loved living in Spain as a kid."

After college at the University of Maryland, Ortiz returned to Spain to help his uncle with the olive mill. "He needed help and I wanted to live in Spain," he said.

When his uncle decided to close the mill, Ortiz became an distributor, traveling extensively to source and sell oil throughout the world.

Over the past decade or so, demand for olive oil worldwide has grown enormously, and American consumers have become more discriminating in purchasing olive oil.

"Lower grade oils used to be exported to the U.S.," said Ortiz. But in major metropolitan areas and their satellite cities and towns, more and more Americans are introduced to the European custom of dipping bread in virgin olive oil rather than slathering it with butter.

The news that olive oil is a health-giving anti-oxidant has spurred demand.

With demand growing worldwide, major olive oil companies began to market blended products, often mixed inferior grades with better quality oils to extend supply, a practice that

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JOAN LABANCA

Chris Ortiz (left) and Chris Walsh import fresh olive oils from both hemispheres for Carter and Cavero.

equates to blending "jug wine with good wine."

Spain produces 1,240,000 tons of the world's olive oil, nearly half of the 300,000 tons produced worldwide.

Italy, a nation long associated with the production of fine olive oils, actually consumes more oil than it is able to produce, Ortiz said, so Italians must import oil themselves in order to have enough to meet domestic demand. "The market for olive oil is growing a lot," Ortiz said.

Fortunately, olives are cultivated throughout the world, not only in Spain and Italy but in sunny California, Tunisia, Greece, Australia and Israel.

In fact, historians say that the oil used to light the temple lamps in 200 B.C. after the Maccabees reclaimed their place of worship from its desecrators was olive oil. That event is commemorated by the Jews every year in the festival of Hanukkah, which this year began on Dec. 5 and continues for eight days.

Customers who visit the store will experience a way of shopping for oil unlike anything they would find or expect in a traditional supermarket.

"We are not a classic business where you walk in and buy a bottle of olive oil," said Howard Berg.

Once a customer selects the oil they prefer and the amount they want to buy, the clerk fills a bottle, weighs it and caps it.

Despite the selection and personalized service, the cost of olive oils at Carter and Cavuto is reasonable in relation to the quality of the product. Their selection of award-winning olive oils are \$27 per bottle, but the store also has a number of carefully chosen olive oils that retail for \$17 for a small bottle or \$24 for a larger size.

In addition to their line of olive oils and vinegars, the store also sells soap and cosmetic products from Provence and Italian pesto.

The store also proudly carries the work of Juan Tito, an artisan from Ortiz's home village in Spain who creates handmade ceramic pitchers and olive wood bowls.

"They are all unique pieces, all done by hand," Ortiz said, noting that Tito is a fourth generation potter who works from his 15th century home. "They are people who are creating something they're passionate about and they're proud of what they do."

The partners in Carter and Cavuto are applying that same philosophy to the business of offering carefully crafted olive oils purchased directly from small vineyards throughout the world.

"The difference in quality is