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## A Savory Addition to Downtown

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Photo by Bonnie Schultz

Jon Hauge, owner of the [Savory Spice Shop](#), recently tasted the [world's hottest pepper](#), the [bhut jolokia](#), also known as the ghost pepper, which is for sale in his shop. "The best word to describe it is HOT," says Hauge. "Sweat was definitely beading up

on my forehead. I tried it with one of my employees, and we took pictures."

A welcome addition to the Princeton retail scene, cooks who have been mail-ordering or traveling a distance for their more exotic spices can now rejoice in the opening of the Savory Spice Shop. Opening day was November 21<sup>st</sup>, which was conveniently the Monday before Thanksgiving. "Since we've opened, business has been good," says Hauge. "Because of the Thanksgiving holiday, we've gotten calls for brining spices, bay leaves and rosemary. Some people have called for sumac; requests have been across the board."

In the back of the shop, the spices are stored in airtight containers that typically turn over 50-200 times per year, with a very small amount that sits in the warehouse. "The spices come in and go out in sales very quickly," says Hauge.



Hauge estimates that 10-15% of the spice selection is organic, while many of the other spices are organic but not certified organic. Salt, for example, is typically an organic spice but not certified.

“We carry some of the more exotic spices that might be challenging to find anywhere else,” says Hauge. “We carry sumac, asafetida, white, green, and black cardamom, whole and ground. We carry various kinds of chili mixes and Aleppo red pepper flakes from Turkey,” a featured ingredient in a recent New York Times recipe for braised carrots. At \$12.50 per gram, the Spanish saffron, which is the best quality from the La Mancha region, is more affordable than one would typically find elsewhere.

All extracts, which run the gamut from vanilla to hazelnut to peppermint extract, are gluten free. Various sugars such as sucanat, which is natural sugar cane sugar, along with sugar blends such as lavender vanilla bean, are available for the baker or someone who wants a zingy topping for pancakes or French toast. Other uncommon items include pink Himalayan sea salt, achiote paste, tamarind fruit paste and rose water.

There is a vast selection of barbecue blends, and for the chocoholic, Mexican cocoa powder, Mayan cocoa powder, and raw organic cacao powder.

“All of our spices are ground fresh weekly, delivered weekly, and the inventory turns around very quickly,” says Hauge. “Over the Thanksgiving weekend, people purchased a lot of gift sets, which include a custom set of two jars along with sets of up to twelve jars and make great gifts.”

He also hopes to form alliances with local chefs who can highlight the shop’s spices in their cooking.

Each day since the store has opened, hot cider made with mulling spices has

been available in the shop, and one of the employees has brought in homemade tortilla soup. Hauge plans to put out cinnamon rolls baked with the various types of cinnamon, as well as other dishes created with the spices sold in the shop so customers can sample how it tastes in the finished product.

Hauge is an avid home cook and comes to the Savory Spice Shop with a strong retail background. In high school he worked for a restaurant and was admitted to the Culinary Institute of America but did not attend because he did not want to work in restaurants as his career. He went on to work as a merchant buyer for Home Depot, where he was responsible for over 300 stores, buying lumber and building materials, and was involved in merchandising, planning and advertising.

From Home Depot, he went on to work at [Bradco](#), where he helped with purchasing, pricing and inventory. When Bradco's largest competitor [ABC Supply Co](#) bought Bradco and asked Hauge to relocate to Wisconsin, Hauge decided against leaving the Northeast and started the Savory Spice Shop instead. "While selling spices is very different than selling lumber, the principles are the same," says Hauge.

[Savory Spice Shop](#) was started in 2004 in Denver, Colorado, by Mike and Janet Johnston, as a merchant of high quality yet affordable spices and seasonings. Following the success of their shop, the Johnstons decided to turn it into a franchise. "I would never have considered owning a franchise," says Hauge, "but I met the Johnstons through my aunt and uncle, went to Denver to see the operation, and decided to become the fourteenth location for the Savory Spice Shop."

Unlike a traditional franchise, Hauge says the Johnstons are very open to suggestions, and he was very impressed with their purchasing and distribution. "It's phenomenal," says Hauge, "They have high quality supplies and are able to deliver regularly, which is hard in the spice business. It allows me to focus on the job and the customers. While I enjoy the purchasing aspect of a retail business, I would've spent a lot of time on purchasing and less with my customers if that wasn't the case."

Hauge hopes that the many spices will tempt people to become more adventurous in their cooking and that the store will give them new ideas. Customers are able to sample most spices before purchasing and can sign up to receive the Savory Spice Shop newsletter in their email as well as follow [Savory Spice Shop Princeton](#) on Facebook.

**About the Author »****Bonnie Schultz**

Bonnie Schultz has worked as a technology and marketing writer in the Boston area. She moved here in 1997 and is the mother of two boys. Since 2007, Bonnie has been blogging about food and community happenings in the Princeton area.

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