

NIELS RODIN

FRUIT GROWING WITH ZEST

Meet citrus enthusiast Niels Rodin. His adventure began in 2009 when he planted his first Yuzu plant, which became the first of the countless specimens under his collection. Currently possessing over 150 varieties of unique citrus fruit - Buddha's hand, citron, oranges, grapefruit, caviar and other unusual limes, and yuzus – his extensive collection had gourmets flocking to his organic orchards, and amongst them, several gastronomically renowned chefs.

By Quiterie Pasquesoone

Photo © Philip Frowein

Where did your passion for citrus fruits come from, Niels?

It stems from three separate interests - botany in general, history (citrus fruit have been with us for at least 3000 years, traversing civilizations, religions and, before that, continents), and food - cooking and eating it.

How do you choose which varieties to grow?

I've made the conscious decision to cultivate rare varieties with a truly distinctive flavor and scent. With the existence of thousands of highly standardized, uniform commercial varieties, I chose to focus on unusual fruits like the famous yuzu, which is in the process of becoming an established favorite. With a very complex scent and taste - it is a genuinely a new flavour, intriguing, different, delicious and exotic. At first, like any self-respecting collector, my aim was to acquire specimens of everything that were unusual. But I was often disappointed by the flavors. Some fruits were too bitter or too sour. Others were dull and characterless. So, I decided to keep only the very best.

Your fruit is cultivated organically. What difference does that make?

Growing organically is a deeply-rooted rationale. I'm not fanatical about it, however it's a proven, effective win-win strategy. Rather than spraying to prevent diseases, I use biocontrol. It saves time because insects do the work for me. The system takes a while to start working properly, but once it's established, it's much more effective than chemicals - and it's a lot more cost-efficient. It makes total sense to use it.

Can you tell us a bit more of your range of fine foods?

As a keen gourmet and someone who tries to be environmentally conscious, I didn't want to waste fruits that wasn't perfect enough to sell, so I decided to create a range of fine foods. It was a success from day one. The idea was to produce something unusual but not too outré, and achieve a perfect balance of flavours, textures and colours so as to recreate the pleasure of eating citrus fruit and allow people to enjoy a product that is highly seasonal all year round.

How did you set about developing the products?

I started making marmalades and liqueurs in about 2008 or 2009. It took me countless trials to get the marmalade recipes right and to obtain the precise textures, flavours and colours that I had in mind. Ditto with the liqueurs. Today, I produce only the most popular recipes. The top favourite is probably the yuzu and Madagascan vanilla marmalade. I don't like a marmalade to be too runny, or when the lid gets sticky - I get really uptight about it (laughs) - so I did lots of tests until the jelly was exactly the right silky texture. The vanilla takes the edge off the bitterness so that you don't need to add too much sugar. You always have to achieve a balance of the five flavours.

Can you tell us about your connections with chefs?

Meeting Laurent Petit was a turning-point for me. He is one of the leading names in French gastronomy, and as of this year he has three Michelin stars. I've been supplying him for several years now. Becoming one of his suppliers is probably one of the

greatest distinctions I'll ever receive. A few years later, I was greatly honoured when star chef Anne Sophie Pic visited my orchard. I was trembling beforehand, but I'll never forget the short time we spent in my greenhouses, sampling fruit and swapping ideas. Recently, I was lucky enough to meet the revered Swiss chef Anton Mosimann, who also has an incredible career. The fact that I'm growing rare citrus fruit in Switzerland and that my name is associated with some of the greatest names in gastronomy has given my business' credibility a massive boost. But it's coherent as a whole, which makes perfect sense, and which enables me to make the amazing flavours of these fruits available to everyone.



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