



Reg Garner, president of TW Garner Food Company, in front of the famous Texas Pete Sauces logo

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

IN THIS TOWN, IT'S ALL ABOUT THE HOT SAUCE

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY LYNN SELDON

With a name like Texas Pete, you'd think this popular hot sauce hailed from the Lone Star State. Folks in Winston-Salem, NC, know better. The spicy sauce was created, and is still produced, in their state. The origin of Texas Pete is a great little history lesson for heat-lovers.

TEXAS PETE'S ZESTY HISTORY LESSON

The now-legendary story about the naming of the sauce goes something like this. "My uncle, Thad Garner, plus his father, mother and two of his brothers, actually started this business back in 1929, when my uncle bought a small barbecue stand and sauce recipe," said Reg Garner, president of the company that produces Texas Pete. As the tale goes, customers of the barbecue stand kept requesting a spicier sauce, so the Garners created a new recipe using red peppers and a still-secret blend of other seasonings (vinegar was and is a key ingredient).

In discussing a name for the unique new sauce, one of the brothers suggested "Mexican Joe." But father Samuel felt the name should be more "American," saying, "Maybe Texas...but, Texas what?" At that moment, Sam's eyes fell upon his son, Harold, who was nicknamed Pete...and the name Texas Pete was born.

Millions of gallons later, Texas Pete Hot Sauce is the classic condiment for many foods throughout the southeastern U.S. and the rest of the world. The Garners say folks in Winston-Salem love it on their eggs, chicken wings, pizza, potato salad and practically everything else. Many restaurants in the area keep the bottles on every table, right along with the salt and pepper—and they also

include the good stuff in a variety of menu staples.

Now called the TW Garner Food Company, this spicy Winston-Salem company is in its fourth generation, with five direct descendants of the founders working there. And they've become much more than a long-time manufacturer of a single hot sauce. They began producing popular jams, jellies and preserves for soldiers at Fort Bragg during World War II and many varieties are still made today. In the 1950s, TW Garner became the first company to manufacture canned Chili Sauce, which is typically used as a topping for hamburgers and hot dogs.

Throughout the 20th century, the company expanded the line to keep up with flavor trends. Early on, they came up with Texas Pete Seafood Cocktail Sauce, which has become a Southern staple. The 1970s saw the addition of Texas Pete Honey Mustard Sauce (great with baked beans), and in the 1980s, Texas Pete Buffalo Style Chicken Wing Barbecue Sauce debuted.

In 2004, TW Garner purchased Vermont's Green Mountain Gringo. This purchase was a natural complement to the legacy of Texas Pete. Green Mountain Gringo products include salsas from mild to hot—we love the Roasted Chile Pepper—and corn tortilla strips.

The company also continues to capitalize on the popularity of the Texas Pete brand. Earlier this year, they came out with two new flavors: Texas Pete Hotter Hot Sauce and Texas Pete Garlic Hot Sauce. Both have the vinegary tang for which the original Texas Pete is well-known, with the heat index tripled in the former and a nice hint of garlic in the latter.

While TW Garner's Winston-Salem headquarters doesn't host visitors for tours, partly owing to the fact that the recipe for Texas Pete is still a secret, the reception area does have an array of gifts and gear for sale. Many of the items feature the Texas Pete logo, which depicts a cowboy about to lasso some serious flavor. Purchase possibilities include various gift boxes, hats, tumblers,



mugs, mouse pads, T-shirts, golf shirts, clocks, golf bags, and even a bright red “koozie” in the shape of a cowboy boot. Reg Garner or one of the other family members just might be passing through the lobby, offering visitors a brush with zesty history far from the Lone Star State.

THE REST OF WINSTON-SALEM

For those pesky stretches in between Texas Pete-spiced meals, Winston-Salem offers an array of sightseeing options.

A great place to start is the Winston-Salem Visitor Center, situated between modern downtown Winston-Salem and historic Old Salem, and housed in a renovated 1837 cotton mill at 200 Brookstown Avenue. From there, it's an easy stroll to Old Salem Museums & Gardens, a historic area simulating the 1700s, when the town had a thriving Moravian community. Stroll the quaint town, chat with appropriately attired interpreters, visit the three museums and do some shopping. Be sure to sample the paper-thin, gingery Moravian Cookies.

In the very modern downtown area, it's fun to explore the thriving Downtown Arts District, with an eclectic collection of studios, galleries and restaurants. If you shop 'til you drop, quench your thirst or snack attack by dropping into the huge new Foothills Brewing location on West Fourth Street.

Further afield, varied historical highlights include Reynolda Village, which was once part of tobacco baron R.J. Reynolds' 1,067-acre estate; Historic Bethabara Park, where the first North Carolina Moravians settled; and the Winston Cup Museum, which preserves early NASCAR history.

WHERE TO STAY

We found two notable options that make for a unique Winston-Salem stay. The Brookstown Inn is located in the same old cotton mill as the Visitor Center. Highlights of this convenient 70-room hotel include spacious rooms, lots of exposed brick walls, friendly service, a wine and cheese reception each evening featuring North Carolina



Queen-Anne styled Henry F. Shaffner House Bed & Breakfast

wines, late-night cookies and milk, and a big Continental breakfast (be sure to top the sausage-and-egg biscuit with Texas Pete).

The second option, the Henry F. Shaffner House Bed & Breakfast, is just around the corner. Built in 1907, it was the home of Shaffner, a co-founder of Wachovia Loan and Trust Company. Hosts Michelle Watson and Chris Hughes welcome overnight guests with a tour of the sprawling house, wine and cheese reception with NC wines, a choice of beautifully decorated rooms, and a hearty homemade breakfast prepared by Michelle.

WHERE TO EAT

Area chefs sure like their Texas Pete. At Sweet Potatoes restaurant in the heart of the Downtown Arts District, co-owners Vivian Joiner and Stephanie Tyson crank out uptown, down-home Southern cooking. The mambo chicken sandwich features a fried chicken breast on a Kaiser roll, with a side of spicy mambo sauce that definitely boasts its share of Texas Pete—Vivian calls it a “sauce with attitude.” As a point of local pride, Chef Stephanie only uses North Carolina sweet potatoes—a delicious ingredient in the biscuits that grace her

version of the hot brown sandwich.

South by Southwest, with its Mexican and Southwestern menu, is also a delectable downtown option. Grilled-fish soft tacos feature local fresh fish



Vivian Joiner and Stephanie Tyson