

# Lowell hot sauce company focuses on community, culture and having the “craic”

BY ALANA LOFTUS

Craic' is an all-encompassing Irish term, used to describe events, entertainment, fun or a story. It is one of the most common phrases thrown around when people think about Irish slang, and when one fishes for a quick way to connect with an Irish person, “what’s the craic?” is usually what comes to mind.

This week I decided to see what the craic is with Brian Ruhlmann- a Massachusetts native whose Irish roots inspired the name of his craft hot sauce company.

His brand is infused with Irish culture, from the name, to the ingredients, to the overall mantra of the brand; having good times with friends, coming together to share stories, food and friendship.

Craic Sauce was born from a journey that started way back in 2014, after Brian combined his passion for food with his love of the outdoors. He started a podcast where he would test and review other craft hot sauces.

“I started interviewing different hot sauce makers and writing blogs. Within a month of doing that, I realized, wow this is very interesting, I’m learning a lot and meeting some cool people.”

This became a sort of mission statement for the brand as time went on. Learning, experiencing and growing with people is what drove Brian to create the brand and ‘Craic Sauce’ was born. He created his first batch in 2017, working out of a small commercial space he shared with some other small businesses.

In the summer of 2020, as the pandemic raged on, Brian felt compelled to turn his passion project into a full-time business.

“I just felt like I needed to spend the summer growing peppers, cooking hot sauce, outside every day at farmers markets.” By 2021, Craic Sauce had built a small team and began expanding by visiting local farmers markets, pop ups and culinary events.

The name, which he admits takes some customers a while to wrap their head around, holds a lot of weight, reflecting not only the Irish connection but the values of the brand as a whole.

“I wanted the name to say; it’s not ‘Brian’s hot sauce’. The reason I started this company is to have more ‘craic’ with your community, enjoy yourself, be outdoors.”

“Good Craic’ was something that I felt, was slowing down” he says. “The ability to joke around, have a good time and meet people. That is one of the most important parts of life- enjoying yourself, building connections and experiences. I also realized I wanted to work outside in nature and have a real connection to farming.”

“Sometimes when I get a little more stressed and there is more work to do, I look at our brand values and that pushes us to call ourselves out a little bit- who are we, what kind of people are we hiring, how are we going about our every day? Even things as simple as the music we’re listening to while we’re cooking are important. The name invigorates us, but it also forces us to hold ourselves accountable.”

The name serves as a constant reminder of why he started the brand, and if they start to forget the values and priorities they started with, it brings them back to base.

Brian’s dual citizenship, which he owes to his Irish grandparents, led him to apply for a semester abroad at University College Dublin, where he fell in love with the city and returned to live for several years after he graduated college. He did a lot of travelling during his time living in Dublin, visiting many European cities where he would meet with different hot sauce makers to interview for his podcast. He praises how diverse Dublin was and cherishes the experience of meeting people from all cultures, which informed the creation of his brand.

Irish food, while traditionally bland and basic, has come to reflect the multiculturalism of the nation in recent years. Brian agrees that there has been a surge of experimental, contemporary Irish chefs that are changing the reputation of Irish food. Though hot sauce and Irish food would rarely have found themselves on the same table in the past, the palettes of Ireland are expanding vastly.

“There are ten to twenty ingredients in our sauce. We tend to focus more on flavor profile than “burn your mouth off” he jokes. “

Though the brand has seen their sales triple in the last year, huge commercial expansion is not the top priority for Brian. In fact, it takes a backseat to many other aims.

“We like to go where we know our customers are. We want to have real relationships with the consumers and the people who work there.”

He is uninterested in being on every major supermarket’s shelf, and instead channels his energy into leading a healthy local lifestyle that contributes socially and economically to their local community. This usually appears in the form of farmers markets, breweries or food festivals.

“We grow based on relationships” he says. “We attended about 306 events last year. That is where we do majority of our business- just hitting the pavement and going where people gather.”

Aside from continuing with their marketing strategy of complete immersion into the community, Brian and the team have big, innovative plans for the future of Craic Sauce.

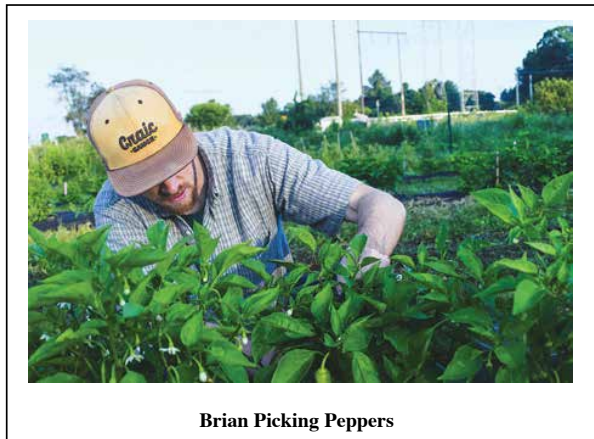
They have recently acquired a space in North Chelmsford, where they plan on hosting in-person classes, tastings and experiences.

“We’re also planning on having a monthly show-and-tell, for amateur hot sauce companies to come and bring their own products. We’re excited to have a space to invite people, to come in and just try some new stuff and gather to share in that experience.”

They are planning their first B-Y-O-H-S (Bring your own hot sauce) event and are hoping to welcome visitors in the coming months. Craic Sauce is available for purchase on their official website, [craicsauce.com](http://craicsauce.com).



Craic Gift Set



Brian Picking Peppers



Festival Set-up



Holiday Set-up