



232



BY JAKE COHEN
4/22/16

PRINT SAVE

DINING

Daniel Holzman's Secret Weapon

The Meatball Shop chef's punchy pickled chile vinegar will replace your hot sauce

Chef Daniel Holzman has always been interested in the origin stories of the ingredients in his kitchen—and when it comes to hot sauce, he marvels at how various cultures around the world use **fermentation** to preserve their fresh local ingredients almost indefinitely.

"I have a bunch of jars on my shelf—peanut- or seed-based sauces from Mexico, fruit-based ones from Asia, all unique to what grows where—and five years after buying one, I can still eat it and not die," the chef of New York's six locations of **The Meatball Shop** says. "That's amazing. **Hot sauce** is an interesting foodstuff, because of those anthropological roots."



When exploring what house sauce he could make for The Meatball Shop ([see the recipe](#)), Holzman aimed for versatility, where the unique flavor profiles would result from how long the ingredients would ferment, not how many elements were packed in there. He wanted a relatively neutral, vinegar-based, not-too-hot fermented chile sauce, so he looked to **Fresno chiles**.

RELATED [Classic Italian Meatballs](#) »

"I love **heirloom varieties** and all that, but **Fresnos** are special," Holzman claims. "Not in the hipster sense of special, but special because they're easy to find, very delicious and have the right level of spice that transforms completely when they ferment."

To the **Fresnos**, he adds whole garlic cloves and a simple solution of **white vinegar** and salt. The lot sits for four weeks to two months, depending on how long variables like weather and humidity affect the fermentation process. During this time, the garlic mellows and sweetens, and the chiles get musty and even more vegetal.

232



The garlic even turns blue—but “if you get black mold, you’ve fucked up. The amount of vinegar and salt should inhibit the growth of bad bacteria,” Holzman warns. At that point, the sauce needs to be tossed.

When the fermentation is done, Holzman blends the mixture, adds more vinegar and salt, and lets it sit further for a 10-day fermentation, shaking it daily so that the solids and liquids continue to ferment, emulsify and thicken together.

“Then it never separates again,” he says. “It’s really fascinating and weird. The fermentation process makes the particles smaller and smaller and suspends them. It naturally changes the compounds, with little tiny acid bugs doing their thing, making one thing into something else. So cool.”

The result is a bright, clean sauce with a not-overpowering hit of garlic, a middling level of heat and a little bit of funk from the fermentation. Once the sauce is bottled, Holzman uses it all over the menus at The Meatball Shop, as well as throughout his day when home. Here are a few of his favorite ways to bring his versatile sauce into yours.

Over Fried Eggs: "This is the quintessential **fried egg** hot sauce," Holzman says. "Egg yolk is almost pure fat, so when you put hot sauce on, first it gets all spicy in your mouth, and then the richness of egg erases it. The dance on your tongue is perfection. Together they trick your tongue into amazingness."

Warm Vinaigrette for Fish: Because the sauce is already completely emulsified, Holzman swears it then helps to make **smooth vinaigrettes** that bring brightness and just a touch of heat to fatty fish like salmon belly. "It makes a great base from a physical perspective," he says. "When a vinaigrette is broken, you taste salt, vinegar, water and heat separately. When it's emulsified, well, you get one flavor on your tongue." For a cup of vinaigrette, combine a tablespoon of the hot sauce with a tablespoon of vinegar, slowly whisk in two-thirds a cup of oil, and then thin it out with another one-third cup of vinegar. Drizzle it over fresh **fish dishes**. "It's just subtle enough that the flavor doesn't overwork the flavor of the fish," he promises.

Spicy Hollandaise and Béarnaise: "Spicy hollandaise is really delicious, whether you're using it on eggs, **asparagus** or even a steak," he claims. For a creamy hollandaise or béarnaise, replace the amount of lemon or vinegar called for in your base recipe with the same amount of hot sauce. Then whisk in a bit more at the end to taste.

Seasoning for Braised Beans and Greens: Holzman jokes, "We all know that spicy **braised beans and greens** are delicious. I'm a Jew from New York, so I'm no soul food expert, but I've heard people say that hot sauce on ham hocks and greens is pretty damned tasty." To make sure the vibrant, fresh flavor of the hot sauce doesn't get cooked away, add two tablespoons of sauce to the end of a braised green dish, stirring and adding more to taste.

In Meatballs (Duh): Of course, Holzman likes to add his fermented chile sauce to his **meatball recipes**, and he claims that it works well in every single meatball recipe you can imagine. But he says the acid and spicy-sour flavor work particularly well in chicken or pork meatballs, adding a salt and vinegar feel for a chicken adobo-esque result. Add a few tablespoons to your favorite recipe, leaving enough room for more heat to be added when finishing the plate.

Find The Meatball Shop [here](#), or in our [DINE app](#).

TAGS: [Ingredients](#) [Condiments](#) [Chefs](#) [New York](#)

[#SecretWeapon](#) [#NYC](#) [#Condiment](#)

