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Harry Hamlin: ‘People like my cooking’



Harry Hamlin and his niece Renee Guilbault are launching The Open Food Company, starting with "Harry’s Famous Rosemary Red Wine Sauce."

Some mild contempt of the processed food industry is one of the prime motivators for actor Harry Hamlin to join his niece in starting The Open Food Company.

“Food Processing?” he asked over the phone when I introduced myself. For a moment, it sounded like he would call off the interview. “We’re kind of the opposite of that.” But after a slight pause, he went on.

“I never wanted to start a food company. I never wanted to do a cooking show, either,” says Hamlin, who has a long resume of movie and TV roles and currently is the uncle of the main character in AMC network’s “Mayfair Witches.”

“I’m no chef, but I cook for my family and friends, and people seem to like what I make. Everybody asks about the pasta sauce. I kind of had no choice but to bring the sauce out.”

The dish he’s most famous for within that circle of family and friends is a marinara sauce with red wine and rosemary as the key ingredients. He started cooking it when he lived in Italy in the 1980s. He’s refined it over the years and once made it on “Real Housewives of Beverly Hills,” a TV show his wife Lisa Rinna was in.

Hamlin’s niece Renee Guilbault is a chef, author and entrepreneur with more than 20 years of experience in the food industry. When AMC asked Hamlin to do a cooking show in 2023, he insisted Guilbault be his partner. So, together they starred in the AMC series “In the Kitchen with Harry Hamlin.”

Red wine and rosemary are among only eight ingredients in Harry’s Famous Rosemary Red Wine Sauce. And although Hamlin wouldn’t tell us the other ingredients just yet, he said all will be revealed when The Open Food Company launches this fall.

As the name implies, The Open Food Company will be very open. Not only will the jarred sauce have few ingredients, all of them natural, but the recipe will be available for cooks to make at home. “Customers will be able to scan a QR code to learn about the recipe and cooking method,” Guilbault says.

“We believe that access to nutritious and delicious food is a human right, that people should know what’s in their food,” she continues. “Harry and I agree that food should be made with simple ingredients found in your own kitchen, and never [with] synthetic flavoring, preservatives, stabilizers or chemicals.”

Despite that criticism – Hamlin critically used the term “ultraprocessed” a few times in our talk – he said he learned a lot about the food industry and the process of scaling up the recipe from what he made in his kitchen to commercial quantities.

The pair was directed to a contract manufacturer in Texas, experienced in making sauces. Expecting a drawn-out effort, Hamlin says he allocated several days to spend with their R&D people, “but within five hours, they had it. It was as good if not better than the original. I was blown away by their R&D people.

“Then I did a blind taste-testing with some of my neighbors, and almost all of them picked the manufactured sauce over what I made in my kitchen.” He feigned being hurt.

As part of their mission, they’ve already donated to The Food Bank for NYC, LA Regional Food Bank, The Open Door Food Pantry in Gloucester, Mass., and Project Angel Food in West Hollywood. Those donations will continue as The Open Food Company gets off the ground, and there may be more.

“Charity-partner support is baked into The Open Food Company’s business model to ensure we can spotlight and meaningfully support different social impact missions with every product we release,” says Guilbault.