

Tabasco's Hot Secret

by Kathleen Cornford

The McIlhenny Company in Louisiana is a famous family-run business. Edmund McIlhenny first started selling Tabasco sauce from his plantation on Avery Island in 1868. Today his great great grandson, Paul McIlhenny, runs the company. Its hot pepper sauce, which is a key ingredient in the Bloody Mary cocktail, is sold in 165 countries.

THE STORY

In the 1840s there was a war between Mexico and the United States, and there were two battles in the Mexican province of Tabasco. After the war an American soldier took some capsicum peppers from Tabasco back home and he gave them to his friend, Edmund McIlhenny, who decided to plant the seeds on Avery Island.

THE CIVIL WAR

In the 1860s there was another war: the American Civil War. Union forces invaded Avery Island, which also had important salt mines. The McIlhenny family fled to Texas. When they returned, the plantation was in ruins: there was nothing, except for the crop of Tabasco peppers. Edmund McIlhenny needed to make money and so he started producing “Tabasco Sauce.”

THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

All of the world’s Tabasco is still produced on Avery Island today. The peppers are picked by hand. They are then macerated in wooden barrels which already contain Tabasco sauce. These barrels are protected from the air by a layer of salt. Three years later McIlhenny employees open the barrels and add vinegar. The sauce is mixed again and placed in bottles.

RECYCLING

The McIlhenny company saves money and resources by using second-hand barrels. These are provided by another famous Southern firm: the Jack Daniels whiskey distillery in Tennessee. This certainly adds to the taste! After production the barrels are used a third time, as firewood.

TABASCO FACTS AND TIPS

- Tabasco Pepper Sauce is packaged in 19 different languages and is distributed in 165 countries worldwide.
- Japan is the second largest Tabasco Pepper Sauce consumer in the world (after the U.S.A). The most common usage there is for pizza and spaghetti.
- According to some doctors, a bit of Tabasco Sauce in your tomato juice or soup may help alleviate congestion if you’re not feeling very well.
- Make sure you take a mini bottle when flying. There is nothing like Tabasco Sauce for improving airline food!



IF YOU GO...

Avery Island isn't really an island: it is a "salt dome" on the Louisiana Gulf Coast, 225 km west of New Orleans. Here you will find the world's only Tabasco factory and bottling plant. Avery Island is also a natural paradise with exotic plants, and a bird sanctuary. But please be careful: it is also home to a few alligators!

Entry is only \$1, but you will probably spend a lot more in the souvenir shop!

Read and answer

Read the article and answer the questions.

1. Who manages the Tabasco company today?
2. How is he related to the company's founder?
3. Where did Edmund McIlhenny plant the pepper seeds?
4. Why did Edmund and his family go to Texas?
5. What was the plantation like when they went back?
6. Why did Edmund decide to produce Tabasco sauce?
7. What happens when the barrels are opened?
8. Why do the barrels add to the taste of the sauce?

Key- Read and answer

1. Paul McIlhenny.
2. He's his great great grandson.
3. He planted them on his plantation on Avery Island.
4. Because, during the Civil War, Union forces invaded the island.
5. It was in ruins.
6. Because after the war he only had the crop of Tabasco peppers and he needed to make money.
7. Vinegar is added and the sauce is placed in bottles.
8. Because they are second-hand barrels that have been used for whiskey.