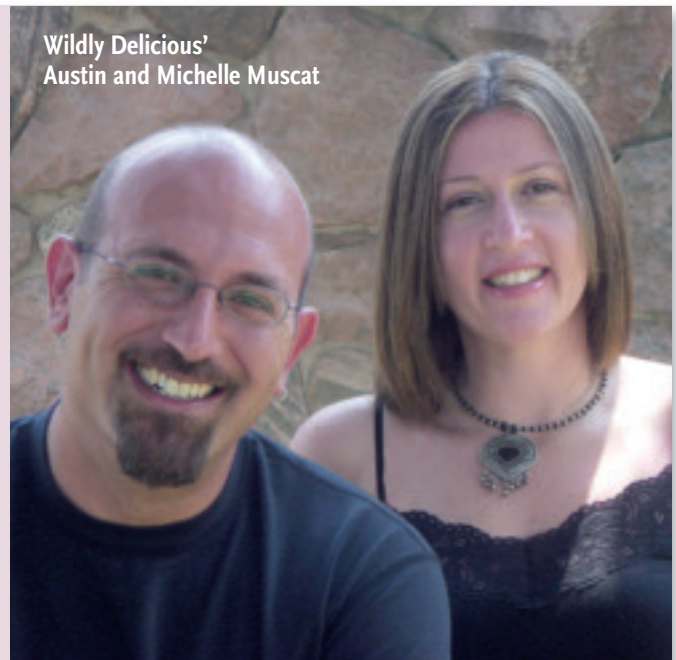


Natalie Locke Milne

Austin Muscat, COO, and Michelle Muscat, CEO, Wildly Delicious Fine Foods

Starting “almost by accident” in Austin and Michelle Muscat’s basement, Toronto-based Wildly Delicious Fine Foods has evolved into one of Canada’s premier specialty food manufacturers. It was 1994 when the Muscats began producing flavoured oils and vinegars, recalls Michelle, a former interior designer. The couple began touting their products on the craft show circuit and within a year had expanded to a small facility in downtown Toronto. In 1996, Austin, an engineer, left his job as a patent agent at a law firm to join Michelle in their venture full-time. Since then the company’s product lineup has grown to include an array of specialty items such as marinades, dips, cocktail rimmers and even tableware. Today in its third location, Wildly Delicious and its two sub-brands, Twilight Cocktail and Olli, is a globally recognized brand that produces over 230 products for retail and an additional 50 products for private label.



Wildly Delicious’
Austin and Michelle Muscat

Q&A

What do you love most about your job and why?

Austin: “I get to combine my love for food with my passion for engineering, and I get to play with a whole bunch of machines that I really enjoy.”

Michelle: “I have a real passion for creativity and I love taking [our products] from concept through to fruition.”

What is your management philosophy?

Austin: “We look for people who don’t believe in getting stuck in one role and want to be able to experience different challenges. We like surrounding ourselves with people who get excited by food.”

Michelle: “We very much feel that our team is our family.”

What is the most challenging part of your job?

Michelle: “Coming up with great ideas all of the time. There’s a big demand for creative new ideas, and sometimes it’s hard to come up with the next thing that’s going to be really good or really different.”

How would you describe your operational or management style?

Austin: “I like to think of myself as fairly relaxed in my management style. I like to let other people on the management team bring forward their ideas and their wisdom. Input from the staff is extraordinarily important to me.”

Where do you see the specialty food sector going?

Austin: “It’s going mainstream. Sometimes we say it’s difficult to keep it as specialty because everything shows up on the grocery store shelves.”

Michelle: “It’s growing. I think a lot of specialty boutiques are doing very well. Grocery is much more open to gourmet and specialty foods and looking to small companies like us for innovation.”

What about opportunities in your sector?

Austin: “As we grow and we get more experience and capabilities we’re looking for opportunities to provide products for the co-packing market. So we actually play in two markets. The larger market gives us better food sales experience and [the money to expand our] equipment machinery capacity that we can then apply to our specialty segment.”

INTHE SPOTLIGHT

FIRST INDUSTRY JOB: **Austin:** “I was a dishwasher.” **Michelle:** “I did hospitality design for McDonald’s restaurants.”

FAVOURITE FOOD: **Austin:** “Thai green curry chicken.” **Michelle:** “I love really good pasta.”

INDUSTRY MENTOR: **Austin:** “My father. He was a European immigrant who had a passion for food. He made cheese, wines and grew vegetables.” **Michelle:** “I look to people like Dufflet Rosenberg of Toronto-based Dufflet Pastries. I’m a big advocate for women entrepreneurs.”