

# *A Taste of Home in Cosmopolitan Toronto*

*by Gilda Spitz*

*Toronto is well known for its  
mosaic of international cultures  
from around the world.*

*An important part of any culture  
is its food.*

*If you are looking for restaurant  
food that reminds you of home,  
you can find Chinese and  
Vietnamese cuisine in one of  
several Chinatowns in the GTA.*

*You can find fine Greek restaurants  
on the Danforth, Italian fare in  
Corso Italia on St. Clair, and Indian  
food in Little India on Gerrard St.*

*But most of us save our restaurant  
experiences for special occasions.  
We usually prefer to eat most meals  
at home, to save money and to  
spend time with our families.*

*But where can we find authentic  
foods that remind us of home, while  
we live thousands of miles away  
in Canada?*

*One of the best answers to that  
question is Mr. Goudas Foods.*

*Goudas Food Products was founded  
in 1969 by Peter Goudas, a Greek  
immigrant who had arrived in  
Toronto two years earlier with  
approximately \$150 in his pocket,  
and virtually no knowledge  
of English.*

*He started his working life in  
Canada at a food packing plant,  
packing rice in the basement of a*

*grocery store in Kensington Market.*

*When he was able to start his own  
food store, he noticed that many  
of his customers came from other  
cultures – Latin, Caribbean, Asian,  
European, and Jewish, among  
others – and he realized  
the importance of learning about  
the eating habits, customs, and  
religions of his multicultural  
clientele.*

*Originally his focus was on  
the foods of Latin America, the  
Caribbean, and East Asia, but  
eventually that focus expanded  
to other cultures as well.  
He called his brand  
“Mr. Goudas.”*

*As the company grew over the  
years, it moved to larger premises  
several times, until it arrived at  
the spacious plant in Vaughan  
that it inhabits today.*

*The company employs about  
200 people in several locations  
in Canada, and over 5000 in  
various factories around the world,  
including Perú, Colombia,  
Chile, Thailand, and India.*

*Eventually, Peter Goudas officially  
brought his son Panos, who has a  
degree in international business,  
into the company.*

*Unofficially, however, Panos, who  
is 29 years old and has been helping  
his dad from early childhood, has  
been in the food business for 29  
years, says Peter with a chuckle.*

*Foods*

*The philosophy of Mr. Goudas*

*Foods is to help its customers find quality foods that they love, no matter where they live, so that they can maintain the pride of their culture and origin.*

*In the early days of Mr. Goudas Foods, Peter had the innovative idea to import and package fruits and vegetables that were previously unavailable in Canada, such as mango, papaya, guava, star fruit, jack fruit, star apple, and breadfruit.*

*Peter, now a courteous gentleman of 66, with piercing blue eyes and a European Old World charm, says food is his passion, and has no plans to retire.*

*He explains how important it is to understand his customers and their food preferences.*

*For example, “in Canada, rice is just rice, with just two varieties – white and brown,” he says.*

*“But for different ethnic groups, there are 32 different varieties of rice.” The difference is significant – while most Canadians prefer parboiled rice that results in individual grains to be eaten with a fork, many other groups prefer sticky rice because it is easier to manipulate with chopsticks.*

*Similarly, there are over 30 varieties of pepper sauce.*

*While many Canadians know only the tomato-based type, Peter says that other types loved around the world are based on papaya, onion, jerk flavour, tamarind, and even coconut.*

*Apparently, Peter knows them all.*

## *Supermarkets*

*In the early years of Goudas Foods, traditional Canadian supermarkets were reluctant to display a large quantity of ethnic foods on their shelves.*

*The first chains to carry his products were the relatively small Food City and IGA chains.*

*“However, gradually,” says Peter, “the larger supermarket chains realized that if they don’t have the right products, they won’t attract the ethnic customers.*

*” Mr. Goudas Foods eventually expanded into the larger chains such as Dominion, A&P, and No Frills.*

*David Primorac, Senior Director of Public Relations for Loblaws agrees.*

*He says, “The demand for ethnic foods has increased over the years and we carry more products now than in previous years.”*

*But there are thousands of ethnic foods available from suppliers like Mr. Goudas Foods, which boasts 1,200 items in its product line.*

*How do they know what foods to stock?*

*Loblaws Company Ltd, which also includes the No Frills discount supermarkets, has had to make decisions on which ethnic foods to offer in which stores.*

*“If one of our stores is located in an area with a high ethnic population, we provide products for that demographic,” says Primorac.*

*“We look at census data and also go by demand.*

*As we put a selection of ethnic products in place, we monitor feedback from customers to help fine-tune the selection.”*

*The decision also depends on the type of store.*

*“In a No Frills, the overall product selection is not as great as in a Loblaws, but both showcase basic items, with Loblaws likely carrying a greater selection overall,” he adds.*

*Although the main target audiences for Mr. Goudas Foods are ethnic groups looking for a familiar taste from home, the word has spread to the general Canadian public as well.*

*Eleni Lykogiorgos, a hairdresser who arrived in Toronto from Greece 35 years ago, is enthusiastic about Mr. Goudas foods.*

*“I buy their beans, lentils, rice, and lemon juice,” she says.*

*“And I even use their canned condensed milk for my favourite cheesecake recipe.”*

*But many people who have no memory of foods from a far-away homeland have also discovered a wider world of tastes through the Goudas brand.*

*Fran Luborsky, a Canadian-born homemaker from Thornhill, says, “I love their bean and lentil soups.*

*They’re delicious, the cost is reasonable, and I like the fact that they are vegetarian.”*

*For more information To help its customers understand its remarkable success story, Goudas Foods has created an unusually large website with a world of information.*

*It contains sections on the history of the company and the Goudas family, its products, recipes, store locations, and more.*

*You can find the website at <http://www.goudasfoods.com> In honour of Peter’s Greek heritage, the website is also available in the Greek language.*