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# Simply Parker's

By Danny Fairchild

I got to do some cookin' of my own for this column! Woo! Yeah! Watch with eyes unlidged as I use my powers for good and test drive some awesome products from Simply Parker's.

Simply Parker's is kind of a big deal. Based in Bellevue, IA, they make some of the best cheese dips/spreads, compound butters, and sauces around. In fact, if you're a HelloFresh subscriber, you've likely already gotten a taste of Simply Parker's Garlic and Herb butter, as they supplied it to HelloFresh up until Simply Parker's decided to focus more on food service.

And that's what brings us here together this day. Because on Monday, Dec. 12, Simply Parker's is opening a cute little store/eatery at 225 W 8<sup>th</sup> St. Yes, this means that you folks who work downtown are going to have another awesome place to get some lunch. What kind of menu are we talking? We're talking stuff like their signature pulled pork or Italian beef sandwiches. We're talkin' soups and Chicago-style hot dogs. And, of course, a daily special thrown in because Simply Parker's is full of surprises. Getting back to the Chicago dogs, I love Chicago dogs. Not just because they're delish, but because there's almost no argument about what an "authentic" Chicago dog consists of. Vienna Beef frank, bright green relish, blah, blah, blah. If it doesn't have this, that, or all of the blahs, it

isn't a Chicago dog. Some Chicagoans will say it has to be made in Chicago to be a Chicago dog. But like... You can see how foolish that is, right? If someone who makes Chicago dogs in Chicago comes to Dubuque and makes a Chicago dog, is it not a Chicago dog? Seeing as how the constituents of a Chicago dog are available just about anywhere, how can you say that Chicago dogs can only be made in Chicago? If you replace the head of your ax after chipping it and then later replace the handle after breaking it, is it still the same ax? Regardless, it's still an ax. It's still the agreed-upon recipe for an ax. Anyway, Chicago dogs make me happy, and I'm happy to have a new way to get them. You should be, too.

Since they're hard at work making sure everything is good to go come Dec. 12, I didn't get to try any of their menu items, but they were very generous with the samples of their dips, butters, and sauces. I came away with two gift bags full of samples just burning a hole in my kitchen. And if these products, which are available in-store, are any indication, it's gonna be some goooooo eatin' come Monday.

As I said, I got to cook for this column. I've been into oysters lately. I like to broil them. I CAN eat a raw oyster and say "Yee-haw! More, please!" but a small part of me imprisoned behind my own eyes will be crying out to cook them. The local Asian grocery has individually quick frozen (IQF) shucked oysters. The price is right, and I don't have to shuck 'em. But 'cept then there's no shell to get that whole oyster-sucking experience. My solution (and I'm sure I'm not the first to come up with it) is to put them on those soup spoons you get in Asian restaurants. I call it oysters on the spoonful. For now.

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I'm still workshopping the name. I bought some stainless steel Asian-style soup spoons that survive the broiler with ease, and the handles cool down quick. Add some butter, maybe some spinach, definitely some sushi vinegar, some panko bread crumbs and maybe a light dusting of parmesan, throw 'em under the broiler for a couple minutes, and boy howdy, it couldn't get better.

Or so I thought. Until I tried making them with Simply Parker's compound butter. A compound butter is butter with stuff in it. The honey butter that comes with the complimentary bread at the supper club? That there is a compound butter. Simply Parker's makes a garlic herb compound butter and a roasted red pepper compound butter. I made six oysters, three with the garlic herb and three with the roasted red pepper. I fully expected the garlic herb to be the star, but the roasted red pepper was my favorite for this application by far. I like a drop of hot sauce on my oysters, but not like... a BIG drop. I don't have to worry about over hot-saucing anymore because the roasted red pepper provides just the perfect amount of spiciness. "Spiciness" was a very deliberate word choice because I wouldn't say there's much heat to it. There's some, but it's not even white-people hot. That's good. A compound butter should provide SOME flavor, not ALL the flavor.

The dips. Oh, I tried all of them. Jalapeno Cheddar, Smoked Swiss Bacon Horseradish, Cheddar Roasted Red Pepper, Crab Dip Deluxe, Lobster Cheddar, Lobster Dip Deluxe, Cheddar Bacon, and your good ol' Cheddar Cheese dip. We armed ourselves with sesame breadsticks, water crackers, and carrot sticks and put the dip in the dip-de-dip-de-dip. Oh, man. I just wish I'd had pretzels, too. So yeah, these are cheese dips, not sour cream dips. Potato chips aren't going to hold up to the stress of this mission. I recommend getting them out at least 15 minutes before serving to let them soften up a bit and let 'em sing.

I did something clever with the Smoked Swiss Bacon Horseradish cheese dip. I'm half-Norwegian, so the holidays means lefse. I picked some up whilst out of town this past weekend. I almost forgot about it until I thought, "What else could I put this on?" Lefse, for the uninitiated, is like a... it's like a very thin Scandinavian tortilla made out of potatoes. By itself, it tastes like hardly anything, but with even just a little cinnamon sugar, it's friggin' amazing. And Smoked Swiss Bacon Horseradish cheese dip? Well that's just begging for something potatoey.

I like horseradish. I wish there were a little more horseradish in it. The word "horseradish" is written small on the label because it's a longer word, but it might as well be in parentheses, based on the flavor. It's there, but barely. I want to feel it in my nose. But that's me. That's not everybody. But the genius of Simply Parker's is the "simply" part. The dips stand by themselves VERY well.

Nothing needed. But they also work well as canvases if you want to get artsy-fartsy. I loved the Jalapeno Cheddar cheese dip all by itself. I don't NEED to add anything. But... I might WANT to add some cumin to it. And I might WANT to add more horseradish to the Smoked Swiss Bacon (Horseradish) dip. Simply Parker's dips are great on their own, but they also open up a lot of possibilities as kind of a jumping off point.

The sauces. Simply Parker's barbecue sauces are also marketed as dipping sauces. We're talking their signature barbecue sauce, their jalapeno barbecue sauce, and their sweet mustard sauce. I cooked up some boneless/skinless chicken thighs and some meatballs to put these sauces to the test. It was recommended that I use the sweet mustard sauce on salmon, and I just so happened to have some salmon, so I broiled some salmon, too. Nothing too fancy in the preparation, but I couldn't resist using a little of the garlic herb butter on the chicken and salmon. That was a good choice.

If you don't like a sweet barbecue sauce, then Simply Parker's probably isn't your bag. That's okay. There's a sauce out there for everyone. I do like a sweet barbecue sauce. I like to put the "candy" in "meat candy." The sweetness of Simply Parker's is the same kind of sweetness you get from a French salad dressing. It doesn't taste like French dressing, mind you, but it's the same kind of sweetness. But also, if you want to put barbecue sauce on your salad, I won't tell your mom.

The jalapeno barbecue sauce doesn't have much heat to it, either. But again, there IS some spiciness. Again, not even white-people hot. But still flavorful. As advertised, the sweet mustard was excellent on salmon. Oh, my. I gotta remember that one. And I could dip pretzels in that stuff all day long.

Come Monday, Dec. 12, I have a feeling we're going to have a lunchtime juggernaut on our hands. A successful area food producer and distributor who always demonstrates a firm grasp on flavors is going to be serving up some lunchtime trouble. The good kind of trouble. The delicious kind of trouble.

Let's get into trouble. ■

**Simply Parker's**  
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