



Jean Arnold

479° Popcorn

Growing up, Jean Arnold spent her evenings playing cards and devouring fresh popcorn with her family. Her mother refused to serve anything other than organic popcorn cooked in a sturdy stovetop popper that she'd hand-crank. Over the years, Arnold experimented with her own organic popcorn, flavoring it with exotic seasonings inspired by living abroad and training at Le Cordon Bleu in London. In the process, she came upon the discovery that 479 degrees Fahrenheit is the optimal temperature for popping corn, and knew immediately that this would be the name of her **popcorn company**, because it reflected the careful attention to detail that she would work hard to incorporate into every element of her business.

These days, Arnold makes her popcorn by hand in small batches in the San Francisco kitchen she started with her husband, offering intriguing flavors, including Alderwood Smoked Sea, Black Truffle + White Cheddar, Chipotle Caramel + Almond, Fleur del Sel Caramel, Ginger Sesame Caramel, Madras Curry Coconut + Cashews, Pimenton de la Vera and Vietnamese Cinnamon Sugar.

Jean shared more of her story with us:

What were you doing before you created 479° Popcorn?

While getting my law degree at Cambridge University, I attended Cordon Bleu in London. Food has always been my passion but I didn't pursue it as a career. After law school, I worked as a corporate financier for Goldman Sachs in London, then a few years later moved to San Francisco to join Yahoo; I was one of the early members of their eCommerce team. While I enjoyed my job, I wanted to do something on my own, so my husband and I bought a small, dilapidated business and turned it into a profitable venture. I loved owning my own business. There's so much to running a small business that you don't get to experience working in a corporate environment. During that time, I worked and entertained a lot at home. I was most known for my foodie flavored popcorn among my friends and family; I always served it as an appetizer or snack and paired it with wine and artisan cocktails. Soon, my hobby/passion turned into a real business when I started selling the popcorns online and via high-end retail shops.



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How do you come up with such interesting flavors?

The flavors are inspired by my international upbringing and travels around the world. I grew up in three continents and traveled during my school breaks. Although some of these flavors may be labeled as "exotic," to me, they mean "comfort." For instance, having spent my childhood in Asia, ginger and sesame became everyday flavors to me.

Do you have a favorite?

Oh, that's like asking which finger I prefer. They are all my favorite darlings! At times, I feel like a purist and I reach for a simple flavor, and at other times I long for something complex. Much of it depends on my mood.

What is the most satisfying or challenging part of your job?

What is most satisfying can also be very challenging at the same time. I am proud of our commitment to organic food and commitment to social responsibility. However, it is challenging for a company to stay true to its mission and grow with integrity as it scales. For example, how can I, as a food entrepreneur, preserve the quality of our product and commitment to social responsibility as we expand? And how do we hire the right people at the right time and align corporate culture to a clear vision and successful growth strategy?

If someone could shadow you for one day at your job, what would surprise that person most?

I guess that person may be most surprised by the intensity of my work style. I enjoy multitasking and don't like to drag out my day with frivolous projects.

When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

Almost every week, I had a different idea as to what I wanted to be. If there is a profession, I wanted to pursue it at some point in my childhood. There's so much to discover and learn, as demonstrated by my "diverse" professional background. You don't need to be pegged to one thing. I let my passion guide me.

Aside from your products, what three food items can you always find in your kitchen?

Peppermint tea, locally grown, my homemade pickles and homemade herb-infused olive oil. —*Denise Shoukas*

Denise Shoukas is a regular [foodspring.com](https://www.foodspring.com) contributor and is the author of [foodspring's food forager blog](https://www.foodspring.com/food-forager-blog).