

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

Rummaging Through My Fridge

BY ROB CLINE

I am prone to feelings of anxiety. I feel anxious about the medical conditions I learn about via pharmaceutical advertising; I feel anxious about my fluctuating coolness factor with my three children; I feel anxious about ever-looming freelance deadlines.

But until I agreed to pen “Behind Closed Doors” for Edible Iowa River Valley, I had never felt any anxiety about the food in my refrigerator. After all, other than my wife and kids, nobody really knows what’s in there—and they’re just as culpable as I for its contents.

Yet somehow I agreed to open my own magnet-adorned door to set a baseline for future investigations into the iceboxes of others. The anxiety kicked in almost immediately.

After all, when I was warned upfront that we didn’t want “a guided tour of organic Wal-Mart Cheetos and Diet Coke.” My first thought was, “Whew! At least the Coke is of the sugar-filled classic variety.” I shuddered at the thought of what “organic Wal-Mart Cheetos” might be. Then I started to worry.

Did the contents of my fridge measure up? And measure up to what, exactly? Perhaps to an idealized refrigerator filled with food that is local, luscious and expressive of my family’s idiosyncratic personality. If that’s the standard, I have work to do.

That said, all is not lost. The Amana Colonies are fairly well represented in our Amana refrigerator. At a recent meeting of the Iowa Cultural Corridor Alliance held in Main Amana, I rediscovered the delicious offerings of the Millstream Brewing Company. The only beer I drink is of the root variety, and Millstream’s contribution to the category is exceptionally smooth and delightful. It’s just one of several great flavors.

A lot of toast in the Cline household is topped with preserves that bear the Amana name. I’m particularly fond of the peach, which has a subtle flavor that isn’t too sweet. I have no complaints about the cherry, either.

We also spice things up at our house with Mad Butcher Salsa. Not only do I enjoy the taste, I like this company’s attitude. As it says on the website (www.madbutchersalsa.com): “Mad Butcher Salsa was developed by real people from garden fresh vegetables in Northwest Iowa—not produced in some food laboratory by geeks who know nothing about flavor!”

My wife and I are on a quest for the perfect popcorn and

next up in our informal taste test is Ellie Mae’s Gourmet Popcorn out of Breda, Iowa. Will it be the perfect combination of texture and taste? We’ll find out the next time the family gathers around the TV to watch our beloved St. Louis Cardinals.

A huge chunk of fridge real estate is currently occupied by a watermelon. This, like the popcorn, is an experiment for us. The seedless melon, which sports a label that admits, “May contain an occasional seed,” was grown by Bell’s Melons in Conesville, Iowa. Does genetic engineering rob these melons of great taste? Don’t know yet, but I’m betting much less spitting is involved than with your standard melon.

And that’s where we are at the moment: a few local treats scattered among more mundane fare. I know there are plenty of other interesting edibles out there and I’m headed into the community and into area refrigerators to find them.

So this column is about more than peeking inside the crispers of local luminaries for the simple voyeuristic pleasure of it—though that would nearly be reason enough for its existence. It also represents an opportunity for

me—and by extension, you—to learn about the unique and quirky foodstuffs that might deserve a spot in both our fridges and, ultimately, our mouths.

I’m already stalking my first few fridges and will be back in this space with the results of my forays. Meanwhile, I have to file this column. The anxiety is getting to me.



Get into Rob’s Fridge:

Bell’s Melons
303 Burlington St.
Conesville, IA , 52739-8530
(319) 725-6631

Ellie Mae’s Gourmet Popcorn
P.O. Box 160
610 Main Street
Breda, IA 51436
(800) 742-0228

Mad Butcher Salsa
P.O. Box 219
Ruthven, IA 51358
(712) 837-5511
www.MadButcherSalsa.com

Millstream Brewing Company
835 48th Ave.
Amana, IA 52203
(319) 622-3672
www.MillstreamBrewing.com