

People

Who you need to know

Opal Rowe
of Stush Patties

PROPER GOOD!

A craving for a taste of home prompted Opal Rowe to launch a thriving Jamaican patty business

By Andrea Yu • Photography by Christie Vuong

IT WAS THE SPRING OF 2019 when Opal Rowe came home from work feeling tired and hungry. She was craving an iconic snack from her childhood in Jamaica—a Jamaican patty. “But, I didn’t know where to get a patty that was more like a meal than junk fast food,” Rowe explains. “There were no ‘good choice’ patties, in terms of healthier ingredients.” The situation prompted Rowe to develop her own better-for-you Jamaican patty recipe.

At the time, Rowe owned a home care business that provided services to elderly clients in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), where she lived, but she’d always had an interest in food and a love for cooking. She knew she wanted her patty filling to be hearty, like what you’d find in a meat pie. When it came to the pastry, Rowe opted to create a vegan version, instead of the traditional pastry recipe that uses beef suet. “I had friends who were vegan and could no longer enjoy patties,” she says, thinking a vegan pastry could be more universally enjoyed.

Recipe development took time. “Patties for Jamaicans are like croissants for the French,” Rowe says. “We buy them, but don’t know how to make them.” Around the end of 2019, Rowe had nailed down a vegan pastry recipe along with a few filling varieties made with both meat and plant-based ingredients.

Around the same time, she was looking to exit her home care business, due to burnout, and found a buyer. Now, Rowe had time to turn her patty recipe into a full-fledged business. She envisioned opening a series of “patty bars” under the name Stush Patties. “Stush is a Jamaican word that means ‘proper,’ and it’s the equivalent of ‘bougie’ or ‘posh,’” Rowe explains. “I was trying to make something healthier that people could have for dinner or with a glass of wine. So, it was a tongue-in-cheek way of saying that we’re making proper patties.”

Once COVID hit, Rowe needed to pivot from her original business idea and decided to sell direct to customers instead, delivering her products to people’s homes. “I just started promoting the patties on Facebook Marketplace,” Rowe explains. At its peak, she would make up to 500 patties a week by hand and deliver them across the GTA. “People were so happy to see you,” she recalls of the home deliveries. But, she recognized

her business model wasn’t scalable. So, at the end of 2020, she took a six-month break to strategize.

Rowe’s new goal was to enter the retail market. That meant a swap from fresh to frozen, designing packaging, reducing her lineup to four flavours: two vegan (Soy Chik’n; Lentil & Veggie) and two with meat (Chicken; Beef) and moving from a shared kitchen to a commercial bakery. By the summer of 2021, Stush Patties officially relaunched as a boxed, frozen product. And thanks to the traction she’d gained from social media, she already had a few independent grocers on board, including McEwan Fine Foods. By the end of 2021, about 20 independent grocers in Toronto were selling Stush Patties.

Then, in 2022, as part of her participation in York University’s YSpace accelerator program, Rowe exhibited Stush Patties at the CHFA NOW trade show in Toronto. One of the first people who visited her booth was a buyer for Whole Foods Market. “They were very interested,” Rowe recalls. Getting into Whole Foods was a long process that involved moving production facilities again and redoing her barcodes. She was finally approved by the grocer in December 2022 and began selling at its seven Ontario locations by September 2023. “When I saw my products in Whole Foods, knowing that it was the first time a Whole Foods in Canada was carrying Jamaican beef patties ... it was magical,” she says.

After Whole Foods, Rowe set her sights on selling patties outside of Ontario—a trickier endeavour since she was selling products with meat. It meant finding a federally approved co-packer, which wasn’t an easy task. “There was a point when the challenge seemed insurmountable,” she says. But Rowe persisted and after a year she found a co-packer and a national distributor shortly afterwards. That led Rowe to her first major out-of-province launches: at 20 IGA stores in British Columbia in September 2024 and five locations of the Montreal organic grocer Marchés TAU a few months later.

Today, Stush Patties are sold in more than 150 stores. Despite the tariff uncertainty, Rowe is still eager to enter the U.S. market in the next year. “We started off in a challenge with COVID, so I’ve learned to realize that if I’m growing, there are going to be challenges,” she says. “If I don’t have challenges, then I have to start wondering what is wrong. When challenges come my way, I embrace them.” **CG**

30 seconds with...

OPAL ROWE

What do you like best about your job?

I love meeting customers, whether they’re trying the patties for the first time or are longtime fans. It’s so uplifting to see how pleasantly surprised people are by the flavour, how supportive they are and the joy on their faces when they realize they’re meeting the person behind the product.

If you weren’t in the food business, what would you be doing?

I think I would definitely be running another business. I really love the creativity and the freedom that having your own business gives. It’s a minefield of learning and you meet so many different people along the way.

What’s the best career advice you’ve received?

Treat problems like puzzles. Problems usually seem like something bad or negative, but they can be fun! Like a jigsaw puzzle. Now, I have a different perspective on the problems I face.

What’s your favourite product from your lineup?

It has to be the Lentil & Veggie patties. It’s a meatless product, but it’s so very good and flavourful and it has a very nice aroma. I usually crave it in the morning, maybe because it’s packed with vegetables, so I think of it as a healthy meal to start the day.

What do you like to do when you’re not working?

Hiking. I love being out in nature. I love being out with the trees and feeling their magnificent presence. It’s a time to rest my mind and wonder at nature. I love walking in the woods any time of the year, [but] particularly in winter.

People

Who you need to know



POWERED UP

How Edward Lalonde turned a kitchen-counter experiment into a fast-growing protein brand

By Andrea Yu Photography by Chantale Lecours

WHILE WORKING AS A personal trainer back in 2012, Montreal-based Edward Lalonde was also selling nutritional supplements and protein powders but found the options for protein powders were gritty and tasted terrible. So, Lalonde started thinking about developing his own shake formulation. In 2014, he transitioned to a job as a senior product manager for a ready-to-eat meal delivery company; but it wasn't until three years later that Lalonde actively started developing a vegan protein shake recipe. He noticed growing interest in plant-based proteins and saw an opportunity in the market to create a better tasting shake.

Most plant-based protein powders are made from pea protein. So, Lalonde's first task was to find the best pea protein out there. "I must have tried 300 different pea protein samples from North America, Canada, the States, Europe, China," he explains. "It was all trial and error to find the one with the most neutral flavour and the best, smooth texture." The same went for all the other ingredients in his shake, from prebiotic fibre to coconut milk powder and stevia. "Everything was from very humble beginnings, starting off with a small scale on my kitchen counter, scaling and weighing ingredients."

It was a part-time venture alongside his full-time work as a senior product manager at a meal delivery company—it took him two years to develop his base recipe and four flavours for the official launch of Good Protein's All-in-One Shake in 2019: Chocolate, Vanilla, Açai Berry and Tropical Fruit. That's also when he quit his full-time job to go all-in on his new venture.

Lalonde focused on direct-to-consumer e-commerce to start. It was a one-man show for the first three years as he worked to get his business off the ground. "It was just me packing all the orders, doing customer service and the purchasing," says Lalonde. "I was working 80 to 100 hours a week. It was rough, for sure." He was packing orders in his Montreal apartment and took over his parents' garage, bringing orders individually to Canada Post to ship them.

The long days paid off. In 2022, Lalonde leaned heavily into digital marketing, such as Google and Facebook ads, and saw his business take off. That led to his first major buyer reaching out from Costco. "They told us they saw our ad on Facebook, and we were everywhere on

their feed," Lalonde explains. But, knowing he was still in the early stages of the business, he didn't feel confident about having the production capacity to fulfil that partnership. "I ended up deciding it wasn't the right time," he says, citing it as one of the hardest business decisions he had to make. Despite this, Lalonde saw the business grow 1,000% year-over-year between 2022 and 2023.

By 2024, after he built up an internal team and partnered with a food broker, Lalonde felt ready to enter the retail market. The first retailer he worked with was Avril Supermarché Santé, a natural food grocer in Quebec, where he launched in November 2024. "They're still one of our best retailers today," Lalonde explains. Then, the retail deals kept on coming. First, there were a few hundred Bulk Barn stores nationally in March 2025. Then, once Costco heard Good Protein was ready for distribution, the retailer called Lalonde again, and this time he was ready. In April 2025, his products launched in 70 Costco warehouses across the country and sold out after seven weeks. Next up was IGA and Sobeys, which sold Good Protein in 300 stores nationally as of May 2025. A launch at a yet-to-be-announced major retailer is planned for the fall of 2025. Currently, Good Protein products can be found in more than 2,500 stores across Canada, in addition to sales through Well.ca and Amazon, the latter of which accounts for up to 25% of the company's sales.

Good Protein is no longer a one-man show. Lalonde now has a team of 50 full-time staff. "To this day, I still wear a lot of hats," he explains. "But I learned how to delegate and really trust a lot of my key people." He'll be leaning on those people even more as he's got big plans for the rest of 2025 and 2026. He just launched High Protein Plant-Based Shake with 32 grams of protein in French Vanilla and Chocolate Milk. Coming up, Lalonde plans to introduce single-serving travel packs, based on consumer demand. And lastly, he's hoping to expand outside of Canada and start selling internationally soon, too.

Looking back, Lalonde feels proud of what he's built and accomplished. He took a risk in starting the business, but if you ask him, there was no other option except to succeed. "For me, there was no Plan B," he says. "I didn't have anything to fall back on. I didn't have a choice. I had to make it happen, and that's what motivated me." **CG**

30 seconds with...

EDWARD LALONDE
GOOD PROTEIN

WHAT DO YOU LIKE BEST ABOUT YOUR JOB?

Honestly, it's really shaping the brand. I have this vision in my head of the exact type of brand I've been wanting to build, and we're building it as we speak. That it's an actual, relevant brand and a household name—that's really what I love the most. Creating new products is a close second.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BEST DAY IN THE BUSINESS?

Our first day of selling in retail and seeing my products physically on shelves in a grocery store. After five years behind a screen looking at numbers through a Shopify store, it was like a whole new world. It was a big moment for us.

WHAT'S THE HARDEST DECISION YOU'VE HAD TO MAKE?

Saying no to Costco back in 2022. That was very hard, but I still think that it was obviously the best decision.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PRODUCT FROM THE LINEUP?

Our Peanut Butter flavour of the All-in-One Shake has been my favourite to develop and consume. But since we launched our 32-gram High Protein Shake, I've been having two or three of the high-protein French Vanilla shakes a day.



People

Who you need to know



(L to R) Jamie Parker and Mike Wenzlawe of Canadian Heritage Roasting Co.

BREWING SUCCESS

How two Alberta entrepreneurs are taking their passion for coffee and the great outdoors and turning it into a thriving business

By Andrea Yu • Photograph by Colin Way

JAMIE PARKER AND MIKE WENZLAWE were sitting around a campfire during an elk-hunting trip in 2014 near Willmore Wilderness Park in Northern Alberta when the idea to start a coffee company was sparked. The idea came to Parker, inspired by the pair's work as wildland firefighters. "We learned to roast coffee in a cast iron pan on the fireline," he explains. They wanted to embody that same connection to the outdoors in a business. "Our cause and our goal is to unite Canadians to pursue outdoor experiences," says Wenzlawe. "Coffee is a conduit and a vessel that we use to do that."

Once they finished working the subsequent firefighting season, in September 2015, Wenzlawe and Parker's next step was to get their hands on some green coffee beans so they could start roasting. They drove from Calgary to Vancouver to pick up their first order of beans from a warehouse. "We thought we were going to have this big, important meeting with bean providers," Wenzlawe recalls. "We showed up in suits at a warehouse to pick up this coffee and were greeted by a 300-pound man in a back brace carrying 160-pound sacks of green beans over his shoulder. I remember him asking: 'Where's your truck?' We pointed to Jamie's Toyota Matrix hatchback. We almost blew out [the car's] suspension on the way home."

They set up shop in Wenzlawe's mother's garage, using countertop roasters to fine-tune the bold, smooth flavour profile they were seeking. By November 2015, they were selling bags of roasted coffee beans on an e-commerce site under the name Calgary Heritage Roasting Co. Hitting the winter market circuit shortly afterwards, Parker and Wenzlawe struggled to keep up with demand. "The countertop roasters that we used only made 100 grams of coffee at a time," Parker explains. "We'd be roasting for three days straight, go into a market, sell out on the first day, go home and roast until three in the morning making new product for the next day."

Wenzlawe and Parker put all the early proceeds of their business back into the operation, upgrading to a larger roaster at the beginning of 2016, and then moving from Wenzlawe's mother's garage into a commercial kitchen by April 2016. The following year, the two realized they needed to expand from direct-to-consumer selling. "We realized that we couldn't survive just selling on e-commerce," says Parker.

They were hesitant, at first, to sell in grocery stores, worried about being perceived as "sell-outs" for being in chain retailers, but participating in the District Ventures business accelerator program made them think otherwise. "Our mentors were like: 'This is ridiculous. You need to get your product out there so people know what you're selling,'" Parker recalls. Their first grocery partner was Community Natural Foods, with just three stores in Alberta. Then they landed on 24 Co-op shelves in Calgary later in 2017.

After partnering with a new distributor who brought their coffee to buyers outside of Alberta, Parker and Wenzlawe found themselves with a branding challenge. "There was a huge amount of resistance for our product in other provinces, like B.C. and Ontario," Wenzlawe recalls. "They couldn't get behind the name." That prompted them to change their name to Canadian Heritage Roasting Co. in 2018, and lean into retro Canadiana branding. The move led to more grocers getting on board—50 Sobeys stores in Alberta, as part of its local program and 11 Choices Market stores in British Columbia. In June 2019, the duo opened a flagship store in Southeast Calgary with a café and in-house roasting operations. Then COVID hit. "We had to lay off all of our staff overnight," Parker says. "Mike and I had to run the entire business, just the two of us for three months straight, 24-7."

The austerity measures helped the duo survive the crisis. Then, in 2021, they launched an instant coffee called Flash Fuel, which would eventually land in MEC stores across Canada. "We saw a big opportunity in the marketplace to have an instant coffee that is designed well, tastes great and is organic," Parker explains.

In 2022, Canadian Heritage Roasting Co. launched in 13 Real Canadian Superstores in Alberta, as part of Loblaw's local program. Then, in November 2024, they made their first major out-of-Alberta debut in 23 Fortinos grocery stores in Ontario. Canadian Heritage Roasting Co. is now available in 1,600 stores across Canada.

Throughout their journey, Wenzlawe and Parker have always prioritized giving back with philanthropic initiatives including roasts to raise funds for wildfire relief.

"It's really heartwarming to see what we've become," says Wenzlawe. "It's cool to know that we've had cause and effect and lasting change. We can do good for the community, for Canada and the environment." **cg**

30 seconds with...

JAMIE AND MIKE

What has been your best day in the business?

MIKE: Getting our Flash Fuel Instant Coffee listed at MEC and seeing it on the shelves was a surreal moment. I used to work at my local MEC as a university student back in 2011, so having something we made available to buy at MECs across Canada was wild.

JAMIE: My best day was opening up the coffee shop. We had a big grand opening and that was the day we felt like we had made it. It was cool to see the community and our fanbase show up.

If you weren't in the food business, what would you be doing?

JAMIE: I would be a creative of some sort. I would still be a business owner, but it'd just be a different product or thing.

MIKE: I can't imagine doing something else because we get to do everything we want with this business. We get to live out our passions, travel, get outdoors, work hard and play hard.

What's the best career advice you've received?

MIKE: Entrepreneurship is a race to see who can suffer the longest. The idea of grit and camaraderie through hard times, that's a lesson that translates directly from fighting wildfires.

What do you like to do when you're not working?

JAMIE: I'm an avid outdoorsman. I own horses and I like horse riding, hunting with the horses, fishing, camping, hiking and backpacking.

MIKE: I love anything to do with the outdoors as well—summer or winter. I travel a lot, especially for adventure tourism. I love fishing, hunting, cross-country skiing, mountain biking or anything that involves getting the heart rate up and earning beers after a fun-filled day.