

THE GOOD STUFF

The health movement is here to stay. With flavors almost too good to be true, The Happy Olive is so much more than a store. A second act for owners Vickie and Richard Bailey, they are inspired by their travels – what a delicious journey.

By Hayley Hill / Photos by Stevye Photography



The Happy Olive in downtown Fairhope has got it going on. If you don't believe me, as Susan Wielkens, a recent transplant and customer, says, "This is the best store in all of Fairhope!" I liken it to shopping in Europe – time stands still as you wander and fall in love many times over as you look through varied treasures. Layered with goodies no foodie can resist, the cheerful staff invites me to sample delectable bites. Where to start? Where to stop? As I ponder, Vickie and Richard Bailey appear. With a warm welcome, the married couple shares their journey.

Curious about their offerings, Richard starts. "My daughter Shayna was teaching organic gardening and had an assignment at Terra Madre, an international food event in Italy. There, she met her husband-to-be, Paolo and they now live in the Piedmont region. When visiting, we would gather olives from his family's groves by knocking them off the trees into nets. That same night, the olives were ground and the next day we would enjoy the best olive oil in the world. As luck would have it, Vickie and I went into an olive oil store in California seven years ago and knew it was meant to be for us in our retirement."

Prior to retiring, Richard was president of a transportation logistics company and Vickie was in education. She served as principal at the Fairhope K1 School and was a founding member of the Fairhope Educational Enrichment Foundation (FEEF). With love for her community, Vickie shares, "I used to bring goodies downtown to the trick or treaters, so we opened on Halloween in 2012 and handed out olive oil samples to all those passing by!"

Well-traveled and inspired by non-processed Mediterranean diet food, the couple wanted that here. They even offer classes and tastings since they want people to know what good food tastes like. Vickie shares, "Grocery store olive oils can sit in a warehouse for a year or two. Most are processed and some even blended with vegetable oil to cut costs. The olive oils we import are based on freshness for maximum health benefits and flavor."

Vickie stands correct. A quick Google search reveals olive oil contains large amounts of powerful antioxidants that benefit the heart, brain, joints, and more. Deemed by some the healthiest fat on earth, many believe high quality olive oil can fight diseases.

As we tour the oils, I am mesmerized by the variety. Obsessed, I can't stop dipping bread in flavors such as lemon, blood orange, basil, wild mushroom and sage, chipotle, walnut, black truffle, white truffle, and dark toasted sesame. However, it doesn't stop there.

Next, we hit the balsamic vinegars, also imported from Italy, to complement the oils. Perfect for everything from steaks to pancakes and salads and marinades, flavors include lavender, cinnamon pear, fig, wild blueberry, honey ginger, grapefruit, dark chocolate, and lemongrass mint. The feeling is best described as a kid in a candy store. But wait! Look over there.

Over there? Mustard. Naturally, Richard is a mustard sommelier, one of five in the country. It's a real thing. While in France, the couple toured the town of Dijon, the epicenter of mustard-making since the Middle Ages. Realizing they could infuse it with their oils, Richard enrolled in the renowned Maille in NYC and Paris to train with the masters of mustard. His knowledge spans growing and processing, flavor profiles, and more. All organic, I promptly put a few on the counter with my other goodies.

Then there are the small-batch local products. Think spices, teas, infused honeys, salts, cheese straws, and even beauty products. The teas and spices are hand-blended by Vickie and yes, I added the herbs de Provence, the black truffle salt and the holiday pepper jelly to my pile. Not wanting to leave, I'd lost track of time but can't remember having more fun. Truly a sensory shopping experience, I am a lifer.



The Happy Olive
314 De La Mare Avenue Fairhope
251.929.0711
And
25741 Perdido Beach Boulevard
Orange Beach
251.981.1557
HappyOlive4.com