

OCNI

Flavours from Another World



PRESS RELEASE - 2023



At the dawn of the 2010s, **Tristan Cano** and **Benoît Le Guein** devised and experimented with their first OCNI — Unidentified Edible Objects in French.

Established in 2014 in the town of Alès, in Southern France, OCNI is a small business specializing in **culinary design** and **food innovation**. Their first OCNI to go on sale? A natural and plant-based **seasoning pencil to sharpen**, with 150,000 units produced annually at their factory in Alès.

As of September 2021, **the collection expands with a brand new OCNI**: a seasoning accessory in the form of a **bottle to grate**. The new addition will debut at Maison&Objet in September 2021 and then at the Made in France trade fair in November 2021. All aboard for a journey to uncharted territory.

TWO PERSONALITIES, A CHANCE ENCOUNTER

Tristan Cano is from the region of Occitanie, in the South of France. **Benoît Le Guein** is from Picardy, in the North. The former is good with numbers and logistics. The latter loves stories and food. Their paths crossed in Paris in 2013, paving the way to a collaboration unlike any other.

Tristan Cano: From Kitchens to Marketing



A native of the town of Alès, Tristan Cano used to dream of becoming a chef. So when the time came, he enrolled at Lycée Jean-Drouant, the Hospitality School of Paris. While preparing his advanced diploma (BTS) in Hospitality and Catering, he specialized in **marketing**, a field that allowed him to combine the world of gastronomy with his interest in sales. Having just graduated, Tristan Cano landed an internship at Le Purgatoire, a hybrid destination in Paris dedicated to food and events. That's where he met Benoît Le Guein. The following year, Tristan Cano

resumed his training and enrolled in a business school in Paris for a Master's in Marketing and Sales. As part of the programme, he interned part-time with Saveurs d'Étoiles, a catering company in the outskirts of Paris, and took his new associate along with him.

Benoît Le Guein: A 'Food Savant' with Brazen Talent



Born in a town between Amiens and Beauvais, early on Benoît Le Guein chose a career in the kitchen. After earning an elementary diploma (BEP) from Le Touquet Hotel Management School, he returned to Amiens to prepare a baccalauréat in humanities, specializing in art — early evidence of the young man's fondness for treading unusual paths and mixing things up. He then signed up for a preparatory art programme in Beauvais before he enrolled at the Quimper School of Fine Arts. After graduating, he continued on his unusual journey with a stint in Paris to study

for a basic diploma (CAP) in pastry while working with different caterers. He then joined the Paris-Cergy National Higher School of Arts — ENSAPC, where the self-styled '**Food Savant**' started his research into **art and food**. In 2012, he took his work along with him to the Higher School of Art and Design — ESAD in Reims, learning culinary design under **Marc Brétilot**. A year later, Benoît Le Guein was hired to design culinary creations served at events held at Le Purgatoire, in Paris. That is where he met Tristan Cano.



The Chemistry of Synergy

Soon enough, the pair realized that their personalities, sense of humour, knowledge and skills clicked. And they were still working with Saveurs d'Étoiles when the idea to start their own project took shape. So they dedicated all their efforts to bringing their ambition to life. Benoît Le Guein enrolled at Paris Descartes University to learn how to start a business, and **OCNI was founded in 2014**.

EDUCATING AND SHARING THEIR PASSION

Inspired by the success of their OCNI, Tristan Cano and Benoît Le Guein now encourage younger generations to take a chance, become entrepreneurs and start their own businesses, just like they did in 2014. Their advice to them: *'Never give up, keep at it, follow your goal, find the right partners for this journey. Reach out, spend time with those who are in the thick of things.'* Since 2016, Benoît Le Guein has taught culinary design at the Catering School of Avignon and at Montpellier University. Since 2017, he has also shared his expertise with students of the Faculty of Tourism and Culture at Angers University.



THE STORY, THE CONCEPT

The Cano-Le Guein duo first had the idea and ambition to create a shared project in 2013. Their vision was for a kind of **laboratory** where they could make attempts, tests, experiments, investigations, discoveries, inventions, and venture off the beaten track... Tristan Cano and Benoît Le Guein want to leave their mark in **culinary design** and **food innovation**. So in 2014, they founded OCNI, whose primary purpose is to devise singular culinary experiences for the event industry.

The First Sharpenable Pencils to Season Your Food

Benoît Le Guein undertook multiple tests and experiments with agar-agar. What's so special about this species of red algae? Crushed to a powder, it can be added to any preparation to achieve a jelly-like consistency. The idea, combined with another experiment on jellified bread conducted by the 'Food Savant' when he was still a student at the School of Fine Arts, yielded the first prototype for **seasoning pencils to sharpen**. The product was first introduced in 2013 for an event in Paris, and they were an instant success. The public raved about the very subtle texture of the pencil shavings and the rush of flavours on the palate.





Putting the Fun Back in Creation

A few shavings is enough to pep up any dish. The product introduces a fun new gesture at the table delivering both a **stylish twist** in your plate and a rush of flavours on the palate. *'You really want to use your seasoning pencil at the table rather than during the preparation of your dish,'* the 'Food Savant' suggests. He speaks of an **'added routine'** to be performed once the meal is served — something to pique the curiosity of your guests, surprise some or amuse others. Because Tristan Cano and Benoît Le Guein like to put the fun back in creation.



When it comes to figuring out the ideal pairings, the **various flavours they have developed** open a multitude of creative possibilities, both sweet and savoury. The OCNI founders recommend sprinkling 'Espelette Pepper' shavings on grilled meats or a dish of pasta in tomato sauce. The 'Basil' goes great with salads, while the 'Preserved Lemon' pencil will provide a nice tangy twist to fish and oysters.

For their packaging designs, Tristan Cano and Benoît Le Guein regularly rely on the talents of **illustrators** to embellish their bags, wrappings, cases and set boxes. For the 2021 holiday season, the pair turned to a Nantes-based artist and illustrator, **Lucille Duchêne**. A selection of her romantic and colourful designs were used to enhance boxed sets of seasoning pencils.



Available Everywhere in France

Today, the seasoning pencils are sold in **more than 700 retail outlets throughout France** (Nature & Découvertes stores, gourmet food stores, high-end food shops, etc.). They are also **sold online** via the OCNI e-shop. The products are also exported internationally to Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Japan.

Seasoning pencils are sold in various packs:

- >> Set of 1 pencil with pencil sharpener: 11,90 €*
- >> Set of 3 pencils with pencil sharpener: 24,90 €*
- >> Pencil alone: 8 €*

*recommended retail price

Full list of flavours available:

Basil, Black Garlic, Black truffle, Cep, Chili Pepper & Garlic, Curry & Turmeric, Espelette Pepper, Fig & cinnamon, Pastis & anise spices, Passion fruit & Lime, Preserved Lemon, Saffron, Smoked Black Garlic.



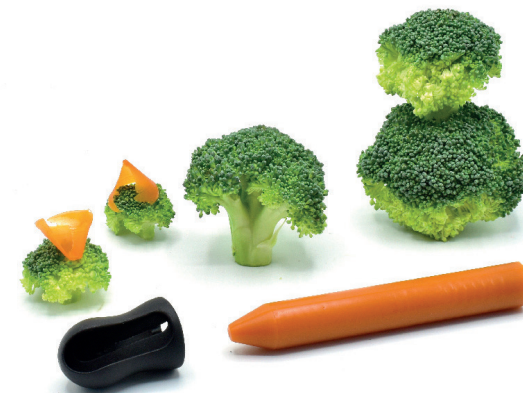
1, 2, 3, GET CRANKING WITH YOUR PENCIL!

- 150,000 pencils produced every year
- 120 shavings for each 18g pencil
- 1-2 shavings per forkful, 5-10 shavings per serving
- Keeps for up to 9 months (at room temperature and away from the light)
- 2 new pencil collections every year
- 16 flavours

100% Natural Ingredients

When it comes to picking ingredients, OCNI works exclusively with natural products. Nothing but unadulterated goodness, starting with the **organic agar-agar** that gives pencils their texture. In a 100% plant-based recipe, it's a great substitute for gelatin, with a high mineral content and almost zero calories.

The unique flavours of each seasoning pencil are also created by blending **100% natural products**: raw ingredients like cep juice, fig pulp, black garlic juice and Espelette pepper pulp — and natural flavourings for some recipes. Preservation is achieved by adding Guérande (PGI) salt and apple cider vinegar produced near Nantes... *'For our Black Garlic pencil, the garlic is smoked in our own factory in Alès,'* Benoît Le Guein points out. *'As for the Cep pencil, we use mushrooms picked in Corrèze, France,'* adds Tristan Cano. Two flavours that rank among the OCNI collection's top sellers, alongside the Basil and Preserved Lemon versions.



PROUDLY COMMITTED

While Tristan Cano and Benoît Le Guein cultivate a touch of whimsy in each of their creations, they also advocate a reasoned approach in their business. Sustainable production is a priority for the duo. Which is why their sourcing policy places emphasis on organic produce and the shortest supply chains possible, with a few notable exceptions like yuzu, which is imported from Japan for the best quality. All of the brand's products are homemade in Alès, with artisanal, '100% natural and plant-based' recipes. Everything is produced in France, including the recyclable packages printed in the nearby city of Millau.

A THRIVING ENDEAVOUR

From Ambitious Young Entrepreneurs in Alès to the Foire de Paris Trade Fair

OCNI Factory soon found its cruising speed. Recently settled in the region, the company was named Judges' Pick in the Alès Audace competition. This was the first of a long list of achievements, which then saw the company join the 2015 Paris Design Week, where it was acclaimed for its sensory experience on the theme of picnics. From 2016 onwards, the creative duo decided to use trade events as a stage, and signed up for their first show with the Miam Alès exhibition to promising results: *'Within two days, we had sold our first 150 pencil box sets,'* Tristan Cano remembers fondly.

Some time after that, OCNI attracted notice at the 2017 Made in France show, then in 2018 Tristan Cano and Benoît Le Guein had an opportunity to present their creations at the Foire de Paris — OCNI had officially made it. The same year, the duo acquired their first workshop in Alès and hired their first long-term employee.

In 2019, the company's successful growth was acknowledged by the industry. The two entrepreneurs were awarded the Silver Prize at the national competition Innovafood, which rewards the best food innovations by plant-based business.

Invaluable Team Spirit

Today, OCNI owns a large factory in the outskirts of Alès and manages a **team of eight employees**, with three on production and two on inventory and logistics. *'Our team is built on plenty of shared bonds and motivation,'* says Tristan Cano. Everyone brings their own story and unconventional background. The company's youngest collaborator, now in her late 20s, is a business school graduate with a proud Southern French accent. The most senior is in his late 40s and boasts extensive experience working in central kitchens: he wanted to explore a new work environment and just happened to have the expertise OCNI needed. The team also includes a former nursery caregiver and supermarket sales advisor who is now a logistics expert. As well as a young mother who used to be a photographer and now works in the kitchen... All of these people make up a tight-knit and dedicated group, that not even the pandemic could throw off: from May 2020 until June 2021, production at OCNI continued uninterrupted and the company's turnover grew by 15%.



STEPPING INTO THE FUTURE

After the Sharpenable Pencil, Here Comes the Gratable Bottle

During the summer of 2021, a second OCNI came out of the Alès lab. This time, the seasoning recipe takes the form of a bottle to grate.

Agar-agar remains the foundation of the new product, and its main ingredient. The edible bottle is about four inches high and is designed to stand proudly on the table. With this new product, Tristan Cano and Benoît Le Guein have created an object at once mouth-watering, ethical and stylish, with the same spirit of sharing the experience with your guests.

The first two available flavours — Smoked Ketchup with Herbs and Sweet Mustard — will be launched at Maison&Objet on 9-13 September 2021 and at the Made in France trade fair on 11-14 November 2021.

Perspectives for Tomorrow

For the 2021-2022 winter season, Benoît Le Guein is planning to attend a training programme at the Alès campus of the IMT Mines engineering school. His plan? To learn about 3D printing and laser cutting technologies applied to the food industry. Another skill for the 'Food Savant' who is already working on formulating and developing new OCNI's for 2022.

By the end of next year, Tristan Cano would also like to find an 'experiential' venue to revisit his interest in event planning. He mentions stories and narratives that would serve as a common thread throughout an installation taking the form of a buffet dinner. The OCNI founders are considering developing this culinary experience initially as a one-off event, held somewhere near Alès. But ultimately they are looking for a unique physical location in the South of France to stage recurring gourmet journeys and flavourful immersions based on their very original visions.



OCNI Factory: key dates

2013	• Tristan Cano and Benoît Le Guein meet at Le Purgatoire in Paris
2014	• OCNI Factory is founded
2015	• Named Judges' Pick at the Alès Audace competition • Sensory immersion at Paris Design Week
2016	• Participation in Miam Alès exhibition and launch of first OCNI — the seasoning pencil
2017	• Participation in Made in France trade fair in Paris
2018	• Participation in Foire de Paris
2019	• Silver Prize at the national competition Innovafood
Sept. 2021	• Launch of second OCNI, the seasoning bottle, first introduced at Maison&Objet 2021





CONTACT

Tristan Cano
tristan@ocni-factory.com
04 66 55 62 37
06 37 96 59 72

