

Chocolate-makers savour the sweet life



Mary West in salesroom of Handmade Village Treats at Lanark, Ontario.

There are, in the Ottawa Valley, chocolates so fresh and sweet that eating one makes you blush, reports Janice Middleton in *The Citizen*.

"It's a common reaction," insists candymaker Don West, who with his wife, Mary, operates Handmade Village Treats — small, highly specialized business in Lanark, a village of 900 southwest of Ottawa.

The chocolates that seem to be everyone's favourites are truffles. Truffles are made of rich dark chocolate filled with a mixture of one-third heavy cream and one-third chocolate laced with a liqueur — Amaretto, Grand Marnier, rum or cherry whiskey and bits of marashino cherry.

West says the truffle taste sensation is "so creamy and smooth, you've probably had nothing like it".

No preservatives

There are few chocolate makers who dare to turn their backs on preservatives and use only fresh milk and butter.

The reason is shelf-life. Without preservatives and with dairy fat, chocolate will stay fresh just eight or ten weeks, while factory-produced chocolates with dehydrated ingredients may languish on the store shelf six months to a year and still be sold as top quality.

But, to be recognized as world-class chocolatiers means turning out a superb product and that means no substitutes. "No dessert tastes quite the same without butter," Mr. West said and his shop caters to discriminating palates.

When the Wests and their four daughters, aged 15 to 22, moved to Lanark they had no intention of becoming chocolatiers. It just happened. They bought an abandoned farmhouse in 1980 with the intention of opening a "white tablecloth" restaurant.

To meet the mortgage payments, West split the house into five sections for crafts and collectable-type boutiques, calling it House of Five Shoppes. He kept the kitchen and dining room and decided to skip the meals and stick with dessert.

West said he works harder over the big copper chocolate pot than he ever did in his former grocery store but the creative nature of it is much more satisfying

"I can't leave it alone. I'm like a mad chemist working on combinations, trying new textures, flavours."

In the winter of 1981 they started producing molded chocolate of a bygone era, investing \$1 500 into turn-of-the-century tin and nickel-plated Easter bunnies. The rabbits come in 120 beautifully detailed shapes and sizes, waist-high to tiny ones the size of one's little finger.

"It took us a three solid weeks of pouring to produce a perfectly molded rabbit," said West.

But the public reaction to the Easter bunnies which range in price from 75 cents to \$38 was worth it. "People loved the nostalgia and we were flooded with more orders than we could fill," he said.

As he mastered the techniques, West has expanded his business — in addition to truffles and bunnies — to include 16 different kinds of fudge, two kinds of

peanut brittle, a popcorn confection with caramel, almonds, pecans and peanuts, candied fruits, jams and chutneys.

The Wests and assistant Tim MacDonald are also perfecting a white chocolate and developing a line of carob candies, which has a similar taste and appearance to cocoa-chocolate for people with an allergy to cocoa beans. They also sell candy made for diabetics.

Energy bus keeps on rolling

The "Energy Bus", created in Canada and introduced to Europe by the European Commission some years ago, is still traveling across Europe, showing factories the best and most efficient ways of conserving energy.

The energy audit vehicle is an original idea conceived and developed in Canada. The "bus" is a customized recreational-type vehicle equipped with sophisticated instruments to measure and analyze energy consumption in industrial and commercial plants and to identify potential energy savings. It is staffed by a team of professional engineers and technicians and equipped with a computer, energy measurement instruments, demonstration equipment and video units.

Before receiving a visit by the energy bus, the firm in question is asked to provide certain information concerning its consumption of energy and the technical equipment it uses. The bus is linked to a common research centre (Ispra in Italy) whose computers record all data and send back their conclusions.

As more than half of the energy consumed in Europe is used in offices, shops and homes, more and more people are coming to realize that the work done by the energy bus is really very useful. A quarter of the energy consumed can be saved by modernizing heating systems, and as much as a half by better insulation.

The energy bus is also useful because it draws up an energy conservation program which is adapted to the particular problems facing each firm and factory. Following the positive results obtained in the Federal Republic of Germany, there are currently six buses in circulation in Italy, two in Belgium, two in the Netherlands, and Ireland will shortly receive one.

Particularly promising results have been obtained in Italy where an energy consumption has been reduced by 10 to 15 per cent in some instances.

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