

Candyland

As interest in gourmet chocolate grows, so does the number of people entering the sweet scene.

BY CHRISTIANNA MCCAUSLAND

Jennifer Hauser has one thing to tell you about that Snickers bar in your hand: It's not chocolate. Not *real* chocolate, at least. Not like hers. "You look at labels today and they've got all this crap in things and everyone wants everything instant and fast—we got frustrated," she says. "We want to slow down and reintroduce people to what chocolate is supposed to taste like. It's a true passion, as a chocoholic, to show people what it's all about."

Music of the spheres: Clarus's handmade truffles are tiny works of art.

Jennifer and her husband Ben are so serious about this, they've quite literally put their money where their mouths are, creating a little taste of Europe amid the monotonous strip malls and homogeneous eateries that mark the York Road corridor. In a small light-industrial park in Timonium, the couple makes all-natural, handmade, Swiss-influenced chocolates at their shop, Glarus. Named for Ben's father's hometown in Switzerland, Glarus produces high-end chocolate truffles and candies based on the recipes and techniques Ben's father used when he was making chocolates in Europe in the 1950s.

Inside, the store is a veritable playground for the grown-up chocolate addict. The walls are painted the color of cocoa powder; warm wood and glass cases filled with truffles and candies evoke the Old World feeling of a European chocolatier. No-frills, brown paper-wrapped boxes stamped with Glarus's trademark Swiss cow are neatly stacked, waiting to accommodate a customer's selection of treats. It smells like warm chocolate, vanilla, and toasted nuts. A large window looks into the kitchen, where Ben and Jennifer create all the chocolates by hand.

The kitchen is conspicuously free of equipment. There is a dry-heat warming tray that keeps melted dark, milk, and white chocolate close at hand. There are a bevy of stainless steel bowls for hand-tempering chocolate and molds for creating the shapes.

Jennifer, now 29, and Ben, 34, met in 2003; at the time, Jennifer was considering opening an artisanal bakery, but Ben convinced her to go into the chocolate business with him. In addition to apprenticing under Ben's father, who is now in the candy business in New England, the two studied in Montreal with global chocolate-making giant Barry-Callebaut.

The couple married shortly after Glarus's December 2004 opening. "When we met, we realized we shared the exact same views," says Jennifer. "We wanted to be very straightforward, back to basics, and make everything by hand—basically to bring back the quality from years ago."

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It's a crusade that's attracted a lot of new members lately, both nationally and locally; in fact, just a few miles from Glarus, Larry McGlinchey is waging his own one-man campaign to put the *bon* back in bonbon at his store, Cacao Lorenzo Chocolatier. Tucked into the lower level of a small office building, the chocolate shop is as diminutive as the fast-talking Irish-American chocolate maker himself. It looks like the inside of a music box; there are pale striped walls and whimsi-

cal shelves covered in chocolate wares, and it is just big enough to hold a handful of people. When Cacao Lorenzo opened in May 2005, it was the culmination of McGlinchey's lifelong interest in chocolate and the platform from which he hopes to change the way Americans look at chocolate—and the way others look at American chocolatiers.

"We're known as the junk chocolate shop of the world," says McGlinchey, 54. "Most Americans were raised on junk chocolate so they don't know the real thing. Once you've had the real thing, you don't need a cultured palate to tell the difference."

He scoffs at the big-brand American chocolate makers who take out the cacao butter and pack their product with palm oil, preservatives, and excess sugars. "I don't like the reputation that Americans can't do this [make chocolate], and I'm trying to turn that attitude around," he says.

McGlinchey's interest in chocolate began while he was working in international medical sales and marketing. He fell in love with European chocolate while traveling, and began taking classes for fun. Eventually, he started making his own chocolate out of his home and gave it to his accounts. "People started calling me more for my chocolate than for medical supplies," he laughs.

Like the Hausers, McGlinchey wants to bring back the old techniques and quality ingredients that were used here 100 years

One sweet couple: Jennifer and Ben Hauser make chocolates at their shop, Glarus.





Labor of love: Larry McGlinchey quit a job in medical sales to start Cacao Lorenzo.

ago. He crafts his truffles and chocolate candies with chocolate imported from France. He lists all his ingredients on his boxes so his customers know exactly what they are consuming. He works with unique flavors—the Basque square is made with Port-soaked figs, the India features a chocolate ganache with five spices, and the Lavender Flowers use imported French lavender. One of McGlinchey's specialties is his Medianoches, roasted hazelnuts wrapped in dark chocolate through a process called "panning." Chocolate is ladled into a special round pan that rotates slowly. The process of coating takes two and a half hours, but according to McGlinchey, it's worth the time.

"I'm half the price and twice the quality of Godiva," he boasts. Visitors are likely to

get a quick history of chocolate from this spry owner, who sees himself as much an educator as a chocolatier. "There's great personal gratification to have someone say, 'I've never tasted anything like this before.'"

More and more often, however, people *have* tasted gourmet chocolates before, as American palates have grown more sophisticated over recent years. Don Montuori, the publisher of *Packaged Facts*, which publishes consumer-market research studies, released a report this spring entitled "Gourmet Chocolate in the United States." His company became interested in this industry segment in 2000, he says, when the trend really picked up speed. By 2005, he was amazed at how far the industry had traveled.

"We noticed that the gourmet market is outpacing the traditional market by a considerable amount," says Montuori, explaining that while the traditional chocolate market is growing at about 4 percent, the gourmet sector is growing at about 10 percent. The term "gourmet" encompasses brands such as Lindt and Ghirardelli as well as brands produced by Whole Foods and small companies like Vermont's Lake Champlain Chocolates. (Small producers like Glarus are harder to track.) Hershey's recent purchase of Scharffen Berger Chocolate, a longtime household name in the gourmet chocolate business, seems to indicate that even the "junk chocolate" industry (to use McGlinchey's term) is paying attention to the trend.

Recent studies on antioxidants have also driven up sales of dark chocolate, which is usually associated with the gourmet sector. "As the population is getting older and more sophisticated with their palates and they have a little more money, they can afford a better chocolate," Montuori adds. "It parallels what you've seen in other industries—like coffee, for example."

Not that this region was completely bereft of high-end chocolate before now. After all, barely a truffle's throw away from both Glarus and Cacao Lorenzo sits the store of veteran chocolatier Albert Kirchmayr. He has seen a lot of trends come and go since he left behind his career as a chef and began making chocolate in the German style. (There are several variations on chocolate-making technique throughout Europe, though Kirchmayr says the differences are fairly subtle.) Back then, in the late 1980s, Kirchmayr had his work cut out explaining to the Twix-consuming public what *real* chocolate was supposed to taste like.

"For me, it was more about creating demand," says Kirchmayr. "At the beginning, it was hard, but it caught on quickly."

McGlinchey is quick to credit Kirchmayr with generating local interest in fine chocolate. "I think I would have had a harder time if he hadn't been here," he says.

Kirchmayr believes recent publicity and a rising knowledge of the product is pushing its popularity forward. He doesn't seem worried about the new chocolate shop

Where To Go

Want to taste what all the fuss is about?

CACAO LORENZO, 1818 Pot Spring Rd., Ste. 20, Timonium, 410-453-9334.

DELACHÈ CHOCOLATE, delachoc.com or 410-268-8100.

GLARUS CHOCOLATIER, 9 W. Aylesbury Rd., Timonium, 410-252-6601.

A. KIRCHMAYR CHOCOLATIER, 9630 Deereco Rd., Timonium, 410-561-7705.

MA PETITE SHOË, 832 W. 36th St., 410-235-3442.

openings so near his home base, likening them to the microbrewery craze of several years ago. "I don't think they are a threat to us because we have a lot of years of experience under our belt," he says. "And chocolate isn't an easy [business] to start."

Plus, it helps that over the years, Kirchmayr has seen consumers become more educated, especially with regards to the importance of freshness. Whereas customers once came in a month before Easter looking for chocolate bunnies, now they know that the chocolate is best consumed soon after it is made and they wait until right before the holiday to get their Easter

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basket goodies. At Glarus, each box of chocolate contains a slip of paper asking that the contents be enjoyed within seven to 10 days of purchase while the fresh ingredients are at their prime. Cacao Lorenzo's shelf life is about three to four weeks.

"What's important to remember is that the reason you need so many mom-and-pop chocolate shops is that they're using fresh ingredients," says Susannah Siger, owner of Ma Petite Shoe, a store selling shoes and chocolate in Hampden. Not unlike the European tradition of having a bakery in every neighborhood, "You need a lot of little guys doing this if you're going to do the European tradition the right way."

When Kirchmayr began, he leveraged his chef's contacts to get his products into hotels, then local stores such as Hechts and Macy's. Over time he has switched his focus to the retail store, where he now does about 90 percent of his business. "If I had to rely on retail sales then, I wouldn't have been in business a year," he recalls.

While Glarus and Cacao Lorenzo only sell through their stores and online, to maintain control over the product, DeLoache

Chocolate in Annapolis has taken a different path. They too inhabit a light-industrial space with an immaculate kitchen, but they have honed their product line down to a few select items that are only available through about 30 local retail outlets, including Eddie's of Roland Park and Ma Petite Shoe.

"We didn't want to be tied to a store with retail hours," says Joanne DeLoache. Her husband and co-owner Philip adds, "Our goal is to be a mid-Atlantic distributor to gourmet shops."

The mainstay of DeLoache's business is their chocolate ganache squares, Champagne cognac-infused ganache draped in a thin, French and Belgian chocolate coating. Each is decorated with a colorful transfer, a design made of cacao butter that adheres to the square's top like a temporary tattoo. The popular Bay Collection features designs like a crab, a lighthouse, and a sailboat. But the company is expanding into corporate logos and wedding favors as well.

"They really are beautiful," says Siger. "I really like that your final taste is the strong Champagne cognac finish."

The DeLoaches were looking for a way to escape their corporate careers. As foodies, they liked the idea of getting into the fast-growing gourmet chocolate sector, so Philip attended the Ecole Chocolat in British Columbia. Still, says Joanne, "We tiptoed into the market." She continued at her corporate job while Philip began working out of a leased commercial kitchen he only had access to on Sundays. When the response from retailers was favor-

able, they invested in a full-time kitchen.

"We're different [from] many chocolatiers in that we don't have 10 flavors," she adds. "We created one chocolate and Philip spent a lot of time on that recipe. Our niche is in the icons and the packaging." DeLoache Chocolate does carry some bars and drinking chocolate, and may expand into other flavors in the future.

As to how sweet that future is—well, it depends who you ask.

"I would be scared if I was them," says Kirchmayr of the new chocolatiers. "When I started, I had connections with hotels and we had at least 50 percent of the business driving out of the shop. I don't think I could have survived without that."

For their part, the new chocolatiers know they have a tough road ahead, but say response has been overwhelmingly good. Says Siger, "I think anyone going into the chocolate business is doing it as a labor of love."

And even Kirchmayr views the growing number of gourmet chocolatiers as a good thing. "If there are more of us out there, it brings more people to chocolate," he says.

Real chocolate.

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Vroom vroom: Carole Chesser, far right, works "Big Red," the enrobing machine Joanne and Philip DeLoache, right, joke they bought "instead of a Porsche."