

Be your own chocolatier

Eric Blair

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When the revolution comes, you won't be able to depend on others for amusing chocolates, so you'll have to start off on your own.

First a distinction in definitions, which I have cut and pasted from this must-read exposé on a high-priced chocolatier¹:

A chocolate maker starts with cacao beans and transforms them into what we know as chocolate. [...] Cacao pods are harvested and fermented, after which the beans are dried. The beans are ...roasted, then cracked and winnowed, leaving cacao nibs. The nibs are milled to produce thick, pasty cacao liquor (or cacao mass). In fine chocolate operations, the cacao liquor is usually combined with additional ingredients (e.g., extra cocoa butter, sugar, milk solids, vanilla, and/or emulsifiers) and further milled to produce a smoother paste. [...] The paste is transferred to a device called a conche where it is refined ...to obtain a silky smooth texture. The chocolate is then tempered to produce a proper crystalline structure (resulting in a glossy finish and crisp snap to the finished product) and molded (into bars, blocks, or individual pieces).

Chocolatiers, on the other hand, typically have no involvement in the actual making of chocolate. They purchase finished chocolate, usually in blocks or chips (aka couverture) such as those you may have seen on display locally at Whole Foods or Central Market. ... The chocolate is then melted, molded, used for ganaches, for enrobing truffles, etc.

If you want to be a chocolate maker, you'll need a lot more help than I can give you, but much of the fun in cocolate comes in the confectionary step, of producing fun new flavors and novel structures out of the chocolate you've grown entirely used to.

Me, I begin with Trader Joe's half-kilo of dark chocolate (sold under the alliterative 'pound plus'), usually trying a quarter kilo at a time.

Then, melt. Find the absolute lowest setting your stove can put out, drop in your chocolate, and chill out. It takes about ten to fifteen for the chocolate to melt (and I'm just doing a quarter kilo at a time); if you rush it in any way, you run risk of burning it, which creates an almost crunchy and not (in my opinion) very pleasant paste.

Once the chocolate is melted, add whatever comes to mind. Some things we've tried:

¹<http://www.dallasfood.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=80>



Figure 1: Melting chocolate, adding sesame seeds. Hand model: Ms BCOH of Baltimore, MD.

- Ginger, powdered or crystallized (or just sliced roots?)
- Nutmeg
- Vanilla extract
- Toasted sesame seeds, which give a touch of roasted taste and a crunch similar to those crisped-rice chocolate bars.
- Red chili powder, chipotle or generic
- Cinnamon, which always goes well whenever chili is present
- Curry powder
- Dried fruit
- If you are in the USA, almonds; if in Europe or a Cadbury-controlled former British-colony, Hazelnuts.

How much? In my experience, a little bit more than you'd expect, because chocolate is a strong taste and most things will be shouted out at low levels (especially for sesame, but maybe hold back the reins on the chili powder).

You can see that many of the additives lean toward *adult chocolate*—not in the sense that it's more useful for porn, but in the sense that kids would hate it. If you're used to the Hershey's/Cadbury kind of chocolate, do try the other options: chocolate with chili and/or curry is its own food which stands on its own in its greatness. These formulations often have a pointless premium added because adding curry powder is less common than adding almonds, so making them on the stove is especially attractive.

Finally, there is the molding process. I'm not one to stand on ceremony, so I typically just use the lids of tupperware containers, but there are many much funner shapes

to be had, like those silicone ice cube trays that make little hearts. But if you expect the consumer to break off segments, make sure that the chocolate is only one or at most two millimeters thick, either all along or at breakpoints, lest things get messy or people are just forced to eat the entire quarter kilo at once.

I typically speed the last step of the process by putting the melted chocolate in the freezer/fridge, where it will return to solid, edible, delightful form in maybe ten or twenty minutes.

There was no magic to any of the above, which I suppose is the point of this post. Going from standard, store-bought chocolate to exciting and interesting chocolate is not something that requires gourmand execution, just the stove's lowest setting and some creative spices.