

A DAY IN THE LIFE

Tunbridge Wells chocolatier [Ira Harris](#) talks us through a day in creating confectionery....

I have cooked all my life, my early experience came as a child spending long summers with my French Godmother, Madame Lingaud, a Parisian who moved to south west France with her husband. As a young adult, being a keen sailor, I crewed in the galley of a large yacht from the UK to Alaska, preparing food, often bought in local markets for all manner of guests and tastes. It was whilst we were in the Caribbean my interest in the technical side of chocolate grew, because I saw cocoa growing.

FIRST THING

The first thing I have to do is cleaning I'm afraid, it's more laboratory/clean room than farmhouse kitchen doing what I do. Temperature and humidity have a huge effect, so the room has be adjusted accordingly before the actual chocolate work begins.

SWEET SKILLS

Everything is about temperature – without getting that right chocolate just doesn't work properly. The most important skill to learn is tempering, which in short, is the process of heating and cooling chocolate so that the cocoa butter in the chocolate properly crystallises to provide the shine and snap.

TAKING TIME

The number of chocolates I make in a day depends on the orders I have, but they can take a long time – a truffle can be a two to three day process, as they need to be assembled in layers, so you tend to work with compatible batches. Bars take less time but you can't relax for a moment or they lose their temper!

TASTE TESTING

Any chef needs a palette and range of experiences to bring their own take on food.



I research daily and talk to my customers of course. I have to taste often for the temper and consistency, but tasting isn't eating – the actual eating is limited; however you can never eat chocolate without analysing.

CHOCOLATE CRAZES

Salted caramels have been the most popular for many for a while now, and that shows no sign of abating. People in the UK are beginning to become more informed about chocolate these days, rather like wine and coffee before it. It's an affordable luxury so why not? Natural plant sweeteners for those people who don't like their chocolate so dark are beginning to be used instead of sugar.

DECADENT DECORATING

I make a variety of ganaches, which I pipe into the shells before capping and enrobing them. I prefer natural decorations using dried fruit, spices and herbs where possible. For creating Easter eggs, I use moulds to shape the chocolate, then they're hand made with truffles inside.

CHILLING OUT

Once they're finished, the chocolates are stored in airtight containers in a cool room with low humidity, but there are times when you have improvise!

KEEPING CLEAN

Before I finish for the day I need to ensure the kitchen is clean – hygiene is crucial in a busy kitchen and the machines all need to be spotless. When an accident happens with chocolate it tends to get about, this can include ceilings...

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