

Cocoanista's couture good enough to eat Sherwood Park chocolatier fuses food and fashion

BY CHRIS ZDEB, EDMONTONJOURNAL.COM MARCH 25, 2011



Cocoanista Jacqueline Jacek, local artisan chocolatier, hand-making couture chocolates in her studio in Sherwood Park.

Photograph by: Chris Schwarz

SHERWOOD PARK — If Jacqueline Jacek's couture confections had legs they could walk a fashion runway.

But they'd have to walk very, very fast not to melt under the hot stage lights.

Her Thai Goddess, for example, is a lemon grass and coconut beauty infused in silky white chocolate.

Her Twisted Mayan? A multistriped spicy chili ganache adorned with anise and vanilla.

Jacek calls herself a "cocoanista," a word she coined that fuses fashionista and chocolatier to describe someone who applies the principles of fashion to the creation of artisan chocolate.

"I decided to make my own dream job and I love fashion and food, so I combined them," she explains.

She thinks she's the only cocoanista in the world.

"Nobody else, as far as I know, has married fashion and chocolate like I have," says Jacek, 29.

All of her chocolate creations are nontraditional and, like fashion designs, are offered in limited six-piece collections that she launches seasonally, four times a year.

The latest offering, Escape 2011, features six flavours from around the world: the Goddess, the Mayan, the Kiwi Kissed Cocktail, the Citron et Poire a Paris, the Tiramisu Truffle and the Home Sweet Home — a decadent caramel made with 100-per-cent pure Canadian maple syrup.

And they're available only until the end of May.

Jacek has had six collections since launching Jacek Chocolate Couture with her husband in December 2009.

She learned to make chocolate by taking a six-month online course for professional chocolatiers while living in New Zealand, before returning to Edmonton.

Jacek uses only the highest-quality, fresh ingredients which she infuses into French chocolate she buys from a distributor. No chocolate-covered centres — too traditional.

She makes every chocolate by hand in a custom-made chocolate studio in the couple's basement that Alberta Health approved for commercial food production.

"We can produce 1,500 chocolates a week, working 10 hours a day, 50 hours a week," Jacek says.

As sole cocoanista, she's limited in the number of retail outlets she can partner with for now.

The plan is to expand the company and hire help, but it will have to wait until after the expansion of her family. Her first baby is due July.

One thing that won't change is the uniqueness of her collections.

"I don't see myself ever running out of new flavours," Jacek says.

"I get inspiration from everywhere. I'm constantly thinking about it, when I'm at a restaurant or eating different things."

A watermelon-rind-scented candle burning while she was painting, recently, inspired her to research the possibility of creating a watermelon-rind infused chocolate for a future collection.

Not all of her inspirations are winners.

"I tried lemon thyme, and for some reason, I couldn't extract enough thyme flavour, so I scrapped it and went to the drawing board," literally.

Like a fashion designer, Jacek draws her creations in pencil and colour, trying various combinations of colour, flavour and design.

The look of a chocolate is as important as the flavour because "we also eat with our eyes, in my opinion," she says.

"My intention is to always have new pieces in each collection, although I might do a best-of collection one day."

Jacek is taking part in her first Western Canada Fashion Week this year, as a vendor and by donating

chocolates for guests and sponsors.

Although her designs haven't made it to the catwalk, "I definitely want to and I have lots of ideas around that," Jacek says.

"I would love to work with a fashion designer and match my collection to their collection, throwing in the extra element of taste or flavour," she explains.

"For example, if they designed a skirt, what would that skirt look like and taste like in a chocolate?"

Melting is not an option.

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