

Guanni Chocolates

It's Back to Basics For The Freshest Chocolate

By David Ross

“All you need to make chocolate is three things: cacao, cocoa butter and sugar,” says Mariella Balbi of Guanni Chocolates in Fallbrook, who is a purist about her chocolates. “Why do you need extras?”

Her chocolates have no preservatives. No additives. Nothing except the basics. Because of that you must eat them within about 14 days or they will spoil, unlike commercial brands that are so loaded up with additives that they can sit around for months. “That is not my concept of fresh!” sniffs Balbi.

You know she’s something of a fanatic about her product, since she writes things like this: “Chocolates reveal our connection with the Earth; each bite contains the life of the Sun. We can taste the whole universe in a piece of chocolate!”

Her chocolates are not cheap. They are about twice as expensive as commercial brands. But your taste buds will be able to tell the difference!

To ensure freshness they are made just before they are shipped. But if you want them really fresh, just walk into the factory and store at 550 Industrial Way. You can also buy

them at a variety of farmers markets (see their Web site below for locations).

Because they are a back-to-basics chocolate, they are actually good for you. They contain some of the same antioxidants and flavonoids contained in red wine. Often people who are allergic to chocolate are not allergic to Guanni Chocolates, unlike those “other” brands, that she considers too sweet and too waxy. “The flavor of our chocolates is honest,” she says. “It’s often the bad things that they put in chocolates that make people allergic to them.” When they are overloaded with additives, they have to cover up the flavor of the additives by adding more sugar.

Unlike commercially-made chocolates, Guanni Chocolates don’t contain lecithin—an emulsifier often added to help ingredients achieve a

smooth consistency because the butter fat of chocolate is so unstable—or gluten.

It’s ironic that Mrs. Balbi, who first came to the U.S. from Peru nine years ago with her husband and three boys, is so fussy about the purity of her chocolates, because she doesn’t really have a sweet tooth.

What she *does* have is a background as a professional chef who was certified at the National Culinary School of Peru and who also earned a master’s degree

in the culinary arts.

Her family, which had made its living from commodities, was forced to move away from Peru when the commodities bubble burst in that country.

Both she and her husband tried a number of jobs in the states. Her husband, trained as an engineer,

wasn’t certified to practice that trade in this country, and so at age 51, did any kind of job he could find.

At first she cleaned houses. “It was a humbling lesson for me. But life teaches you in unusual ways,” she recalls.

She cleaned for “a beautiful group of ladies.” She used to tell them, “You have beautiful kitchens. Why don’t you cook?”

This led to her catering for some of her ladies and to becoming a “personal chef.” More and more people that she knew insisted that she needed to get into the food business.

She and her husband looked at the three ways to enter the market that required the minimum initial investment: by making beer, bread or chocolates. They concluded that chocolates required the smallest investment and gave a good opportunity to grow.

First, she introduced her chocolates to her catering customers, who raved about them and wanted more.

“I decided to jump into the pool,” she recalls. Guanni Chocolates was born in July of 2006. She started selling at the Escondido Farmers Market with an initial investment of \$500. “The beauty of the farmers markets is they allow you to create a business





without much money, to open it and experiment with your product. If your product is good you can make a living.”

She expanded to other farmers markets and now has Guanni Chocolates at nine area markets.

The Fallbrook factory opened in April of 2009. The Guanni name is a construction of the names of her four children, Gianni, Juan Alvaro and Ian.

“The beautiful thing about food is the act of creation,” she says. “Before I started to make chocolates, I didn’t actually eat sweets.”

When she went into making chocolates, she said to herself, “Why do things the same as others do?”

“This is not commercial chocolate. Everything is made from scratch. It uses nothing that is already made,” she says.

To show what she was talking about, she went to a shelf in her factory and laid out a cacao bean, which, when peeled, reveals the nibs, which provide the chocolate flavor.

When the nib is ground it produces the cacao liquor, which is the base of chocolate. It is high in fat—cocoa butter is 53% fat—but it is a healthy fat, high in antioxidants.

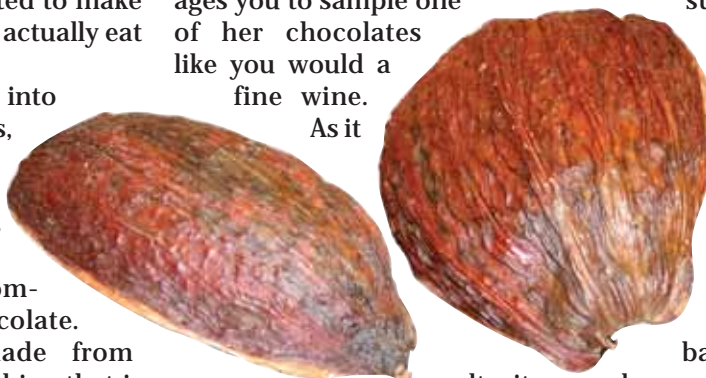
The chocolatier mixes the cacao butter, liquor, some vanilla beans and sugar. “You don’t need anything else,” she says. Because it doesn’t have additives, it requires less sugar, so it’s less fattening.

Working with chocolate at this elemental stage can be tricky.

Cacao butter, for instance, is either in pieces or is a liquid. There is no middle stage. “It will drive you nuts,” she says.

But the result is something magical. Mrs. Balbi encourages you to sample one of her chocolates like you would a fine wine.

As it



melts, it pleases the palate with complex flavors and leaves an interesting, lingering after-taste, particularly if you have one of her truffles that also has a hint of hot pepper in it. “I like to touch the little doors in your palate,” she says. “Our palate is a laboratory for flavors.”

One such is the truffle “Aruma,” described as “Extra bittersweet chocolate and Peruvian hot peppers ganache,

enrobed in 75% chocolate and Quinoa.” Or how about: Loreto. “Passion fruit and apricots in 45% milk chocolate.”

She uses cacao from Peru, one of the places where cacao originated. “I think it tastes better if you buy it from where it’s from,” she says.

She also uses the Criollo chocolate, which, of the top five varieties, is the one used by the top chocolate makers. It is more fragrant and less bitter than other chocolate varieties.

For those who care about such things, the chocolate she uses is a “fair trade” product from a single plantation in Peru that grows it using organic principles.

Besides her decadent truffles, she also sells chocolate bars, trail mix, cacao beans in burlap bags, cacao powder, cacao nibs, sugar free chocolates sweetened with yacon, pastries and even hot chocolate mix. Needless to say, everything is fresh.

Find out more about Guanni Chocolates by calling them at 760-468-4295, emailing them at info@guannichocolates.com or visiting their Website: www.guannichocolates.com.



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