



# For the love of *chocolate*

Celebrating the crave-worthy confection adored around the world

by Christie Judson

**C**hocolate – in any one of its many forms – is, without exception, cause for excitement.

Who among us hasn't revelled in the sweet anticipation of opening a box of assorted chocolate confections housing a surprise cream, caramel, nut, coconut, fudge or fruit filling?

As one of the world's oldest and most celebrated foods, chocolate – which was consumed exclusively in liquid form for most of its existence – has a history as rich as its flavour and texture.

Made from the pounded seeds of the tropical cacao tree, the "food of the gods" was first consumed by the ancient Maya of Mexico and Central America from approximately 200 to 900 AD. Later, the Maya began trading the valuable seeds with the Aztec, who considered chocolate such a luxury, it was given only to warriors and nobility.

Long hailed for its medicinal and mood-

enhancing benefits, chocolate eventually made its way over to Europe in the 16th century. Some of the earliest European cocoa-makers were apothecaries who used it to formulate cures for a broad range of ailments, including fever, liver disease, kidney disfunction, toothaches – even hangovers.

The first solid eating chocolate was



Brian Giebelhaus photo

introduced in 1847 by England's Fry and Sons Company. However, it wasn't until 1868 – nearly 20 years later – that Richard Cadbury introduced the first box of chocolates, followed, shortly thereafter, by the world's first milk-chocolate bar, courtesy of Daniel Peter and Henri Nestlé.

Like their forefathers, modern chocolate makers – such as Brad Potentier, president of Bernard Callebaut Dealers Association – have the skill and tools to turn chocolate into miniature pieces of art. Potentier, however, is quick to note that novice "chocolatiers" can produce an impressive homemade dessert or handmade gift with a few simple ingredients and an appetite for fun.

While molded chocolates require special equipment and precision heating techniques, Potentier says hand-formed chocolates – such as dark chocolate ganache truffles – are a relatively simple, yet beautifully decadent, option for beginners.

*continued*

# “Good chocolate is a product of levity...”

“Ganache is the ideal dessert. If you muck it up and it’s too runny, it’s perfect for a fondue. If it’s too hard, you can simply cut it up into cubes.”

The recipe – guaranteed to produce “oohs” and “ahs” – is relatively straightforward:

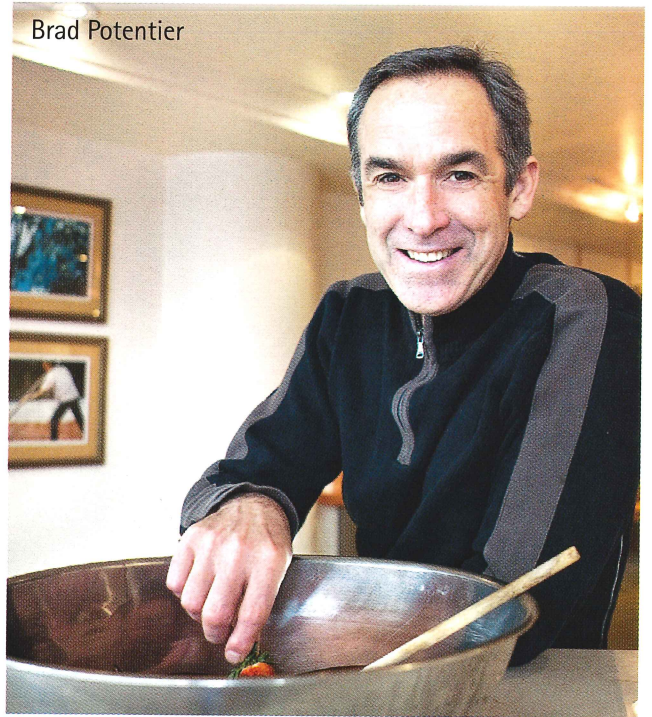
1. Heat 500 millilitres of whipping cream to between 70 and 80 degrees and slowly drop in one kg of cut up dark (semi-sweet or bitter) chocolate. Stir, uncovered, until it reaches a pudding-like consistency.
2. Line three to four shallow metal pans with plastic wrap and fill to not more than 1/2 to 3/4 inches high with the (lukewarm) chocolate mixture. Let cool completely for 60 to 90 minutes.
3. When cool, grasp ends of plastic wrap and lift ganache out of tray and lay on counter. Use a melon baller to scoop out 10-gram pieces. Seal each piece (yields approximately 130 to 150) by dipping in a bowl of melted dark chocolate. Let cool.
4. Dip pieces again in melted chocolate, then roll in powdered cocoa, chopped nuts, chocolate shavings, shredded coconut, sprinkles or savoury spices, such as cracked pepper and sea salt.

“It’s not necessary to melt the chocolate beforehand. The idea is to drop the temperature of the cream by putting in the chunks of chocolate. If it is overheated, it will separate.”

Potentier says whether you’re making the truffles as a gift, or enjoying them with family or friends alongside a fine glass of red wine or full-bodied coffee, the most important thing to remember is to take your time and enjoy the process.

“You should never be in a rush. The one thing I always tell people is: good chocolate is a product of levity.” ☺

Brad Potentier



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