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Chocolate Sculptures

Art to bite into

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Unfortunately you can create chocolate sculptures which are too beautiful to bite into.

Attending a course at the Chocolate Academy in Zurich showed me that even professional Confectioners and Bakers have a nut to crack.

It concerns primarily temperature. The temperature of the material. The table. The tools. And above all also the hands. "They are simply too warm!" states Brigitte Linder and looks desperately on her hands, then on melted lump, which actually is to become an eagle wing. "I washed my hands already several times with cold water, but it simply doesn't help." Likewise Mrs. Linder, most course attendees fight with the matter of the subject. Chocolate, as a well known fact, melts in hands faster than to anyone's likings.

The six women and five men, who presented themselves on a Tuesday morning at eight o'clock in the premises of Zurich's Chocolate Academy of the chocolate company Barry Callebaut for a two-day course, work concentrated. The goal of the training course is: To learn how to sculpture and model as well as pouring chocolate by creating a freely standing eagle on rocks and a show piece made with poured molds. These creations are meant to serve as Buffet decoration or shop window presentation. At the end of the course the participants may take their creations with home.

Two professionals at the work

For Brigitte Linder that means to transport several kilos of chocolate, in partially fragile state, without damage across the globe. The 41 year old lives in Halifax, Canada and came all the way particularly to attend five courses at the Chocolate Academy in her homeland Switzerland. "Six months ago my husband and I lived in Montreal, where I worked in chocolate production" explains Mrs. Linder. Her French wasn't good enough in order to find a job in her professional occupation as secretary. Thus she landed a job in the production of a Belgian Chocolatier. "Now I would like to become an independent Confectioner in Halifax." The Eagle and the caste show piece comes in handy as reference and means of publicity.

The participants are trained by two excellent qualified professionals when it comes to food presentation and sculpting. Toni Steininger, professional in the art of wood sculpting and multiple international gold medal winner in the disciplines chocolate sculptures and ice carving and Rolf Mürner, Pastry Chef of the Swiss national team and last years world champion, he introduces the art of the molded show pieces with petals, flowers, filigree hearts, spheres and the likes.

Mr. Mürner is an enthusiast and master of the Airbrushing. Normally this technology is used in the decoration of motorcycle tanks and car hoods - popular motives there are Eagles, Unicorn, skimpy dressed women and the USA flag. Instead of airbrushing auto parts Mr. Mürner uses the technique on chocolate objects and gives hearts, flowers and spheres tender colors in all shades and deals generously with gold dust. If the chocolate objects

come directly out the freezer before airbrushing them it results with a velvety effect. Some of the food colors he obtains himself in Las Vegas. "I airbrush nearly everything and use the Airbrush gun almost daily," he says with a sparkle in his eyes. You have to believe him.

Not much chatting is going on, at the most they ask to borrow a tool "Do you just need the knife or can I take it?", or "can I take it?". Serious faces bend over lumps of chocolate which likewise a Golem (The word *golem* is used in the Bible to refer to an embryonic or incomplete substance) an eagle has to be developed. Chocolate smeared hands hesitate before they touch the still clean handle of the hot-air gun, which does not stand a chance in the long run.

A young Confectioner with a Beckham hair-style has already a smudge of Couverture in the corner of his mouth and Mr. Steininger too nibbles on a callet from the Couverture supply. Others quarrel with the Chocolatiers dearest child, the Robotcoupe. With this chocolate chipper and mixing machine the Couverture callets blend to a moderate tempered smooth matter if it's operated correctly. If you fill in too many callets, half the melted stuff sticks to the wall off the mixing bowl while the center is still dry and crumbly. Also the duration of the mixing process plays an important role; the longer you mix the smudgy the substance becomes. But like so often, experience is everything. After a few trials you already recognize by the sound of the machine whether the correct consistency is reached or not.

The pervasive smell of chocolate tends to irritate the nasal mucous, again and again you hear a sneeze or snuffle. Several 40 liter tanks of melted chocolate Couverture, which is kept in constant motion, provide the sweet smelling nuisance. Cascades of white, dark and milk chocolate – what a paradise!

In an emergency the cooling spray helps

The speedier participants attempt the eagle's body while others are still busy with the rock base. With the badly smudged hot-air gun Couverture pieces are put in place onto the round chocolate base. Delicate pieces are fast set by the aid of the cooling spray. Courageously the students knead, model and carve with mucky hands, like three-year olds in the sand box by rain. But the childlike absorbedness is missing. Critical and partly envious glimpse to the neighbors' Eagle wander around. Seldom have you seen a trace of satisfaction in their faces, freely after the slogan: "Uff, the other's birds do not look better."

What develops on the work surfaces actually resembles all kinds off: Water buffalos, iguanas, seals and poodle. Also Globi participates. Just no eagles. Mr. Steininger circulates between the work stations and helps out with getting the proportions and expressions right, how to let the bird's appearance look more aggressive and where to place the joints. He shows how to develop the chest and the wing's elbow. He sometimes puts his hands on to sketch lines into a parrot looking beak or to alter too puffy cheeks. He stresses the need work out all unevenness with the carving tool so the end product doesn't a plucked chicken.

Chocolate is an impatient material, it applies to work quickly. If the material cools down you cant work it any longer it becomes hard and crumbly. Who believes to be able to strike with more heat the nature of the cocoa is mistaken. Legs bend; wings droop before they could attain to full grown wings or bills. Brigitte Linder groans.

It borders on a miracle: By the end of the first day all eleven sculptures prospered to a state that you can grasp the silhouette of a bird of pray. So they were ready for the next day to be dressed up with feathers.

"I was under pressure"

To outfit a chocolate eagle with feathers is a genuine never-ending task: The individual feathers repeatedly fall down if - one suspects it - the temperature is not correct. Each

individual feather wants to be carefully cut out of a rolled piece of chocolate and sometimes even dressed with a pattern, then held quickly close to the hot-air gun and finally stuck on the correct place that the feather pattern does not have weaving errors. We remember: we do not want a plucked chicken's look.

Brigitte Linder's bird is the last to be spray painted. With the chocolate airbrush-gun it receives an even make-up. Her apron tells uncountable stories of memorable fights between too warm hands and soft chocolate. "Actually there was no real cause, but I felt under pressure thus to the matter that I was the latter" the Swiss-Canadian confesses with an inclined grin. The others already started with the pouring of the show piece parts whilst she was still cutting and placing feathers and more feathers. "Actually I'm more interested in the second part of the training course." she states. "There I feel rather at home, for years I worked in the chocolate production molding all kinds of objects"



"They are simply too warm!": Between Brigitte Linder's fingers the Chocolate-Eagle melts.

The bird flies

The pitfalls lurk also by poured decoration pieces. Chocolate hearts, red and velvety, break; white and pink shaded petals break; spheres crumble. Even large stable forms, which are used for the bases of such super structures, can take damage. Brigitte Linder struggles with the leftover items from the casting production. She tries to acquire the taste of beauty in fractured spheres and hearts. "That's what you get when you work to slow and end up being last in sculpting the Eagle." With a sponge, knife, and the hot-air gun the eye sores are battled.

Remains to say: Despite all the odds you can do a lot with Chocolate. "No borders are set to the fantasy." says Rolf Mürner, whilst the students adhere with utmost care to the model System construction parts in Las Vegas optics.

Against all fears, worrisome and warm hands, Brigitte Linder can successful carry away approximately four kilograms of sculpted and caste chocolate into the new world.