



True confections

New York chocolate makers breaking the mold

By CYNTHIA KILIAN

WHEN Forrest Gump proclaimed, "Life is like a box of chocolates," he wasn't referring to the sophisticated confections in this city.

While imported chocolate from all over the world has been pleasing New York palates, you need look no further than our own backyard to see a new wave of New York chocolatiers creating sensual, inventive confections.

Check out their work at the Chocolate Show this weekend or at the following shops:

■ "First, eye seduction" is the philosophy behind *Chocolat Moderne*, the West 20th Street chocolate lab where molded confections beckon with intricate appliques and hand-applied luster powder.

Smitten by the hand-made bonbons she tasted on a trip to Brussels, former banker Joan Coukos started creating recipes in her tiny Manhattan kitchen. Her co-workers were so delighted, she decided to study chocolate making professionally.

Three years later, her line of luxury chocolates includes the "Sweet Embrace of Chocolate," a truffle collection with creations called Madame Crazy (espresso and a touch of lemon with dark chocolate) and Havana Heat (dark chocolate with medium-hot habanero pepper). The Player spies it with single malt Scotch.

For prices, pick-up and delivery, call (917) 488-9044 or visit www.chocolatmoderne.com.

■ They call him Mr. Chocolate, but you probably know him better as Jacques Torres, the former Le Cirque pastry chef and Food Network star who opened his own chocolate factory in DUMBO three years back.

At *Jacques Torres Chocolate*, visitors sit at one of three café tables and sip his signature thick hot chocolate (made with real chocolate, not cocoa) or nibble chocolate, not cocoa) or nibble pain au chocolate, then watch while luscious confections — white chocolate topped with al-



Patrick Coston (left) and Nick Morgenstern create goodies for The Art of Chocolate. At Jacques Torres Chocolate (below, left), all confections are made on the premises. The Sweet Bliss company offers Van Gooey chocolate bars (below, right).



monds, pistachios and candied ginger, for example — are made on the premises.

66 Water St., between Dock and Main streets, (718) 875-9772, www.mrchocolate.com

■ Maribel Lieberman started making sugar candies to sell to other kids when she was 8. An education in fashion design and a career in catering led to an interest in creating confections, which she first piled at Solfo's Lunettes at Chocolate in 2000, and now at nearby MarieBelle.

Her signature line is decorated with brown-and-blue graphic designs, while a fashion line features whimsical touches such as corsets or a woman walking her dog.

She insists on a high concentration of cocoa for morsels flavored with Earl Grey tea, dulce de leche and saffron.

She also specializes in candy bars with Vargas-inspired babes on the wrappers.

484 Broome St. at Wooster Street, (212) 925-8800, www.mariebelle.com.

■ As pastry chef at Illo on Bryant Park, Patrick Coston has earned accolades, not the least of which came from customers carrying home his handmade chocolates from the New American restaurant.

The bad news is, the restaurant will no longer sell the exquisitely molded pieces covered in imported Swiss chocolate and filled with intense ganache flavored with citrus, berry and tea.

The good news is, Coston has started *The Art of Chocolate*, a Web site where you can view and order the tempting creations.

Visit www.theartofchocolate.com or call 1-888-880-3472.

■ *Chocolate Bar*, the Greenwich Village candy store for adults, specializes in chocolate and coffee. Slip your liquid of choice (as long as it's chocolate or coffee) at the small counter or choose from an irresistible cache of chocolaty delights from the likes of Jacques Torres and Sweet Bliss.

Signature chocolate bars, brownies, cookies and bonbons filled with caramel, praline or seasonal pumpkin will satisfy your sweet tooth.

48 Eighth Ave., between Jane and Horatio streets, (212) 366-1541, www.chocolatbar NYC.com

■ Ralph Lauren loved the butter crunch his private chef, Ilene C. Shame, made so much, he suggested she market it.

So you can thank him for *Sweet Bliss*, the chocolate company of edible designs she started with partner Iris Libby two years ago.

Shame harks back to childhood indulgences for fantasy creations. Try to resist a Chocolate Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwich (with chocolate instead of bread), Chocolate-covered Pistachio Brittle Crunch or a Chocolate Almond Biscotti Caramel Cluster.

Visit www.sweetbliss.com or call (212) 346-0417.

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Three cheers for red, white and chocolate.

Designer cocoa props

WHERE else will you see models dressed in chocolate?

For the first time, the public is invited to the outrageous fashion show that kicks off the annual Chocolate Show tonight in Chelsea.

Designers such as Nicole Miller hook up with chocolatiers to create amazing catwalk confections.

But there's more than cocoa couture to the Chocolate Show, which drew some 25,000 visitors last year. There are demos by top pastry chefs and chocolatiers, sculptors and most important, samples.

The Fashion Show and cocktail reception are today from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Altman Building, 135 W. 18th St. Tickets cost \$60. The event benefits DIFFA (Design Industries Foundation Fighting AIDS).

The Chocolate Show is at Metropolitan Pavilion, next door at 125 W. 18th St. (between Sixth and Seventh avenues) tomorrow through Sunday, starting at 10 a.m.

Tickets are \$20 for adults. For more info, call (866) CHOC-NYC or visit www.chocolateshow.com.

— Cynthia Kilian