



Indulging Dark Desires at The Chocolate Fetish



BY DOUG JANZ

ONE OF THE WONDERFUL REWARDS OF operating a gourmet shop like The Chocolate Fetish in downtown Asheville is seeing the faces of customers who sample the fare. Reactions here, especially from women, fall between tasting a finely crafted wine and trying on a diamond ring.

There is a mix of delight, indulgence and romance, all from a bite or two of chocolate. But these are not just any pieces of chocolate. Bill and Sue Foley, the shop's manager/owner husband-and-wife team, give impromptu lessons in the art and science of chocolate, and one quickly realizes there is much more to making great truffles than simply putting chocolate around a soft filling.

No, this is chocolate at its finest. The Chocolate Fetish has

been voted the region's best chocolate shop for seven straight years in a poll by Mountain Xpress, an Asheville publication, and more recently the shop was selected to the Los Angeles Times "America's Best" series.

"We use chocolates from six countries — Belgium, Germany, France, Switzerland, Venezuela and four types from the United States," Bill says. "We blend the chocolates, which is unusual. We don't use preservatives, additives or vegetable oils in our signature products.

"The important things are freshness, top-quality ingredients, service, and the recipes and the way we do things."

The business has been in operation since 1986, but the Foleys bought it less than two years ago, renovating and enlarging the shop and doubling the number of products. They've evolved from customers to owners to resident experts, and have also dou-

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bled the business, offering both European- and American-style truffles in exotic flavors like Velvet Sin, Wine and Roses, Champagne, and Nazelnut Gianduia.

Flavor combinations include wasabi and sesame in the Dragon's Kiss truffle, 14 spices in the Chai Moon, and cayenne in the Ancient Pleasures — all European-style truffles, the shop's biggest sellers. It was the American truffles that were selected to the Los Angeles Times series.

For those who wonder what makes a truffle, it's a soft ganache filling thinly covered by chocolate, usually eaten in a couple of bites. It's best to let it melt in your mouth.

"European style has a ganache center that is lighter and less dense, and we use European chocolates," Bill says. "The flavors are a lot more sophisticated and complex."

The shop has a large variety of tasty concoctions, from chocolate-covered raisins and nuts to ginger, apricots, or

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almond-filled dates, all coated in chocolate. The ginger is imported from Australia and the apricots from Turkey.

Two more treats are bark and turtles, which vary in size, shape and thickness as well as content. The Chocolate Fetish makes 23 kinds of truffles and about 100 different products.

The Foleys spend plenty of time on their experimental truffles, mixing flavors and several kinds of chocolates until

they find the right balance. The wasabi and cayenne pepper truffles each took months and many batches to perfect. Regular customers served as taste testers.

“Right now we have three batches of turtle flops that didn’t work out while we were trying to develop some new flavors,” Sue says. “We’re close on one.”

“The trick,” Bill says, “is to get the flavors to complement each other.”

The display cases in the small sidewalk shop are humidity-controlled, and most of the experimenting is done in a climate-controlled, glassed-in room behind the display counters, although the exact process and recipes are always kept secret.

Walk-in trade is heavy, with plenty of regulars. The Foleys and their staff enjoy meeting people and usually offer enthusiastic explanations for each chocolate sensation, using descriptive and sometimes technical terms similar to wine tasting. They’re also not shy about giving out small samples.

The pitch borders on irresistible. Few people leave empty-handed — unless they eat their purchase before making it to the door.

The Chocolate Fetish has the feel of a neighborhood shop. The Foleys will even take phone orders from regular cus-




tomers, ask what kind of car they’re driving and then hand-deliver the order when the customer pulls up outside and honks.

While people love to visit the shop for their own pleasure, they also buy chocolate for presents or complimentary business gifts — the kind that make an impression. Even people from sophisticated locales can appreciate this chocolate, and it takes

only a little bit to satisfy.

Best of all, says Bill, ever the salesman, “Chocolate is good for you. It has natural endorphins; it does make you feel good. It releases chemicals that simulate how you feel when you’re in love.”

There is indeed passion in chocolate. Diamonds may be forever, but chocolate is something for right now.

The Chocolate Fetish is located at 36 Haywood Street in Asheville. Phone (828) 258-2353 or visit www.chocolatefetish.com. 

Doug Janz lives in Johnson City and is a regular contributor to Marquee.

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