



'Chocolate Heaven' August 12, 2008

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For many women, chocolate is more than an indulgence. It ranks high up there in the hierarchy of necessary foods; they really can't imagine life without it. With this in mind, friends and business partners, Janis Galanis and Jenny Pierre are attempting to satisfy your craving at a store that is choc-full of chocolate. At The Chocol-Art Shoppe, in the Mount Royal Plaza, Mount Royal Avenue, they say that women - and men - with a sweet tooth for fine chocolate can find a 'chocolate heaven' of sorts. After sifting through different business ideas, Janis and Jenny decided on opening a handmade chocolate factory - though they had no prior experience in making chocolate apart from baking chocolate akes. After receiving specialized training in chocolate making abroad, the business partners opened their doors on August 2 with an attention to everything being made with love and care. "We have everything that you can think of, but our main focus is that it's handmade. We don't do pre-packaged chocolate, or things that you can buy in any old store. These chocolates are hand-rolled, hand-dipped and all of the ingredients are put together here at the shoppe," said Jenny.

The Chocol-Art Shoppe's handmade sweet treats are freshly prepared everyday and made exclusively with Guittard raw chocolate ingredients. Flavoured truffles, plain chocolate bars, fudge, brownies, cupcakes, candied apples, cookies dipped in chocolate, pretzels smothered in sweet chocolatey goodness, sugar-free chocolate, chocolate filled with fruit and/or nut, and chocolate lollipops are only a fraction of what is offered at the Chocol-Art Shoppe. However, if you're looking for chocolate that is a bit more personalized, Janis and Jenny say that the only limit is your creativity and imagination. For example, for a wedding reception in October, the Shoppe is preparing heart-shaped chocolates with the name of the bride and groom on it. Janis and Jenny can also customize chocolates for baby showers, bachelor parties, graduation gifts, Christmas, and mature events. Their gift chocolates can be arranged in baskets, accompanied by balloons, teddy bears, greeting cards, and an assortment of other

items. The chocolate can also be made into your colour of choice. While the chocolate may seem intimidating to most, Janis and Jenny enjoy would tell you that making chocolate may be easier than you probably think. The main thing to be aware of is the temperature of the chocolate. When preparing milk chocolate for example, it must remain within the 86 - 90 degree range. Tempering brings the cocoa butter to the place where it is most stable and will have the longest shelf life with the best quality. It is important that it is done properly and that no water comes in contact with the chocolate because it will cause the chocolate to clump and the damage is irreversible. If the temperature drops outside of its range, you will have what chocolate makers call 'bloom', a whitish discolouration that coats the

chocolate, as opposed to the high gloss look that you desire."Before I started making chocolate, I would see the chocolate with that white look, and I'd always think that it was spoilt. But it's not spoilt. It's really just out of temper," said Janis. Though bloom takes away from the chocolate's aesthetic appeal, and makes the

texture somewhat gritty, it does not affect the taste. Each of her chocolate products require a different process - some more labour-intensive than others. The most delicate chocolate to produce would probably be the truffles. To make truffles, Janis and Jenny start with a ganache, which is a fluffy mix of the chocolate and the ingredients that give the flavour like mint, guava, or cappuccino. But the classic truffle, with no flavour added, is still a favourite among chocolate lovers.

"Once you take the ganache that you want to use, you roll it into a little ball and then you roll it into whatever chocolate you're going to use - whether milk chocolate, dark chocolate, white chocolate. It's usually hand rolled twice and then drizzled with another chocolate topping," said Jenny. The truffle is then left to cool.

"So the truffle ends up being very, very rich and dense. And though it's small and you may think you can just sit there and eat a whole bunch of them, they're actually very rich," she added. And this richness requires some caution when eating."The best thing when you're eating truffles is to let them rest at room temperature first; you don't take them out of the cooler and eat it. When you do this, you get to taste all of the flavors," said

Janis."You also get more of that little crunch on the outside and the moistness of the middle when you eat it at room temperature," Jenny added.

The business partners seem to have a good thing going here, and the momentum of sales is already building. They have a little commercial advertising, and a lot of word of mouth to thank for that."Once the word gets out, and you have a good product that's really it. And once people know where you are, they're gonna' come," Janis noted. The type of chocolate they use is also bringing patrons back. Jenny said that the Guittard raw chocolate used at the Shoppe is superior to many other types of chocolate. The oldest family-owned and operated

chocolate company in the US, the Guittard Chocolate Company continues to prove itself as the one of the world's most respected purveyors of premium chocolate. Janis and Jenny would boast that this chocolate has no waxy aftertaste, but they'd prefer if you come in, have a sample and be the judge.

Conveniently, the chocolate at The Choccol-Art Shoppe is not sold according to weight. Based on her own experience, Janis believes that persons can get more value for their money when they pay per unit rather than by weight. At a chocolate store in Florida, Janis picked up one truffle and ended up paying way more than she anticipated."I paid \$2.11 for one truffle after they weighed it! But I feel that when you don't weigh it, you can see the price and you see what you're buying. There's no surprise at the end because you don't have a

scale," said Janis. As Janis and Jenny continue to experiment with new forms of chocolate in the upcoming weeks, they are looking into including various cooking spices into their chocolate. So in the very near future, patrons may find ginger, curry and cayenne pepper flavoured truffles."The peppered chocolate is supposedly a big deal because of that sweet flavour of the chocolate and the spicy flavor. So we're going to try it and see how people respond," said Jenny. Janis noted that she's seen truffles made with the infamous wasabi,

Japanese green horseradish powder commonly served with sushi. Whether they're creating classic truffles, chocolate party favours, or spicy chocolate novelties, Janis and Jenny believes that handmade chocolate is definitely the way to go."When you buy a [store-bought] chocolate bar, do you know when it was made, or how it has been sitting on the shelf? Our chocolate is fresh and not packaged

. We made our chocolate fresh here," said Janis.