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Kitchens: a love letter

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CHALET
in Cape Elizabeth**

*February
2021*

**And a Very
Decadent
Guide to
MAINE'S BEST
CHOCOLATE
SHOPS**

Truffle TROVE

MAINE'S ARTISANAL CHOCOLATIERS LAY A TRAIL OF EDIBLE GOLD FROM LUBEC TO OGUNQUIT

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To taste chocolate—*good* chocolate—is to chew on a series of calculated contradictions. Sweet meets salty with a blissful bite into a chocolate-covered sea-salt caramel. Sweet meets bitter as dark chocolate pools over the tongue's taste map. Art meets science as each truffle is carefully concocted, then decorated, painted, plated, and packaged. Chocolatiers are master manipulators, not just of taste but of all the senses. From unwrapping to smelling, biting, and chewing, their confections stimulate from tongue to toes, elevating the overall human experience in the time it takes to consume a bonbon.

It's in pursuit of bonbons—and bars, turtles, truffles, and more—that photographer Lauryn Hottinger and I venture from Portland to Wells, compiling a list of the crème de la crème of chocolatiers just in time for Valentine's Day. Although this Drive follows a southern coastal route, Maine's artisanal chocolate scene reaches the far corners and islands of the state. Take the **Bavarian Chocolate Haus** in Bridgton, where nostalgic treats are handmade under the joyous supervision of owner Scott Ferrari in a shop that looks as if it were plucked off a Munich side street. Or Monica Elliott of **Monica's Chocolates**, who dazzles Lubec with her passionate twist on confectionary creation and her utterly heartwarming story that originated in Peru and fatefully extended to Maine. In Limerick, Lynn Wright details treats by hand-piping, dipping,



A delicious display of milk cashew turtles at The Bistro at R&R Chocolate in Wells.



opposite Fun fact: Chocolate truffles were named for their close resemblance to the coveted truffle mushroom. *right* An impeccable display of confections from Ragged Coast Chocolates, including a map of Kate's origins—a unique way to share her story with customers. *far right* These artful treats blanket local black currant berries in bittersweet Latin American chocolate.



and adorning her chocolates in small batches at the **Wright Chocolate House**. For a state that holds craftsmanship, artistry, and quality in the highest esteem, chocolate comes as no exception. Each craggy, mountainous, or fielded corner of Maine seems to possess its own shop displaying delectable delicacies that are as good to look at as to eat.

Dean's Sweets is our first stop, and we are graciously greeted by Kristin and Dean Bingham, spouses and owners of the specialty shop with locations on Portland's Fore and Cove Streets. As a practicing architect with an impressive 40-year career, Dean actually designed the Fore Street shop, complete with reclaimed windows that allow visitors to peek into the chocolate-making room. Initially, Dean spent his free time creating truffles as gifts for close friends and family. When he met Kristin, the pair decided to take their confectionary passion to the professional level, selling truffles, bars, drinking chocolate, subscription boxes, and more. Before we leave, Kristin offers us samples of customer favorites: chewy sea-salt caramel and smooth maple truffles. As we chew, Dean cites the similarities

in his two careers—architecture and chocolate—which both demand careful attention to aesthetics and detailing.

Chocolats Passion, a French-chocolate boutique on Brackett Street in Portland, is our next stop. Owner and chocolatier Catherine Wiersema's story spans from France to Massachusetts to Maine, and she's been perfecting chocolate recipes along the way. Her shop is filled with artful handmade confections (adorned with colorful, hand-sprayed designs) created with the freshest local ingredients like seasonally handpicked fruits and organic citrus, dairy, and honey, plus fair-trade E. Guittard cocoa powder (which is higher in cocoa butter for extra-rich flavor). Team members Sarah Levine and Darcy Poor share samples with Lauryn and me—Apple Cider and Mexican Hot Chocolate—which erupt on the tongue in a rich outpouring of carefully balanced ingredients and specialty spices. Other unique flavors include Bananas Foster—with banana, caramel, walnuts, and rum—and Lime Habañero, boasting pepper and lime within a silky caramelized white ganache.

In Westbrook, Kate and Steve Shaffer welcome us at the door to their impressive operation, **Ragged Coast**



A seasonal army of milk chocolate turkeys—a popular Thanksgiving special—await their next mission.



Other unique flavors include bananas foster—with banana, caramel, walnuts, and rum—and lime habañero, boasting pepper and lime **within a silky caramelized white ganache.**

Chocolates. Although the space looks more like a chocolate factory than a shop—comprising several rooms complete with racks and rows of ingredients and freshly made treats—Kate tells us of her humble beginnings on idyllic Isle au Haut inside her home kitchen. Now the author of three cookbooks, *Desserted: Recipes and Tales from an Island Chocolatier*, *Chocolate for Beginners*, and *The Maine Farm Table Cookbook*, Kate shares her confectionary secrets with customers and aspiring home chocolatiers alike. Perhaps most emblematic of Ragged Coast is the Farm Market Collection, which spotlights Maine’s growers, gardeners, and harvesters by sourcing incredibly local—and fleetingly seasonal—ingredients and incorporating them into one-of-a-kind flavor combinations like rhubarb, Tree-to-Sea Maple Caramel, and Cassis de Resistance (Kate’s favorite indulgence, with local black currant berries wrapped in bittersweet chocolate sourced from Latin America).

right Sandwich pralines take center stage at R&R Chocolate. *above* A selection of chocolatier Brenda Strum’s masterpieces, handcrafted in small batches in Wells.



With flavors like Yuzu Honey, Sour Cherry, and Szechuan Peppercorn, a hand-brushed box of confections from Chocolats Passion is a multimedia work of art.



left At Ragged Coast Chocolates, a silky-smooth chocolate cascade fills an oversized turkey mold just in time for the holidays. *far left* Chocolate-covered fruits—like these cherries and Brenda Strum's triple-dipped strawberries—please the palate as much as the eye. *below* A painterly ganache-filled Passion Fruit Vanilla truffle is aptly named—and shaped—for this Valentine's season.



Harbor Candy Shop in Ogunquit dazzles sweet seekers with a mesmerizing confectionary display and opulent interior.



Our next stop takes us 40 minutes south, where proprietor and chocolatier Brenda Strum has tastefully melded the best of a bistro, market, and chocolate shop into **The Bistro at R&R Chocolate**, just off Route 1 in Wells. If highly indulgent specialty items suit your fancy, then Brenda's carefully selected and shrink-wrapped bottles of wine—shades of Willy Wonka, the bottles are hand-dipped in decadent chocolate—are sure to satisfy. Other offerings include triple-dipped strawberries almost too pretty to eat, a filled-fresh-per-order cannoli, specialty cakes, and—if you're in the mood for lunch *before* dessert—an entire menu of sandwiches, salads, and sides. As Brenda tells us about her wine collection—selected to pair with her chocolates and other treats—Lauryn and I lunch on sandwiches and turtle and truffle samples, ending our visit on a sweet finale.

As evening settles over the coast, Lauryn and I reach our final stop, **Harbor Candy Shop**, tucked into Ogun-

quit's charming Main Street. Twinkling lights adorn the surrounding houses, and holiday shoppers bob from store to store. A wooden sign dangles over the storefront like a muse, beckoning us into a lavish interior decorated with shelves upon shelves of handmade treats of every conceivable variety. Owner Jean Foss is committed to dazzling passersby with freshly made confections, using ingredients that are thoughtfully selected and sourced. Harbor Candy Shop has gained both national and international customer appreciation since opening in 1956, and the atmosphere retains its inviting aura, encouraging a lengthy visit.

Laden with treats for the drive home, Lauryn and I muse over our trip, voicing our gratitude for living in a place that encourages bold exploration of creative pursuits—including chocolate—giving makers and aspiring culinarians an open space to perfect their passions with an indulgent audience close at hand. ■



A CHOCOHOLIC'S GUIDE TO MAINE



From bonbons to truffles to turtles and more,
this map has ample sweetness for you to explore

WORDS BY HEATHER CHAPMAN | ILLUSTRATION BY MORGAN BIRTWELL



1. MAINE WINDJAMMER ASSOCIATION

WINE, DINE, AND CHOCOLATE CRUISE

Rockland
STEPHENTABER.COM @THESCHOONERSTEPHENTABER

Plan ahead for a four-night excursion with the Schooner *Stephen Taber* for a Wine, Dine, and Chocolate cruise over Memorial Day weekend. Gourmet confections aboard courtesy of Ragged Coast Chocolates. Visit stephentaber.com for more information.

2. BIXBY & CO

One Sea Street Place | Rockland
BIXBYCO.COM | @BIXBYCO

From bark to bonbons to bourbon and more, Rockland's Bixby & Co.—currently curbside pickup only—makes delicious treats using ethically sourced chocolate. Don't miss the seasonal specials and Beer Brittle using Allagash brews.

3. DEAN'S SWEETS

475 Fore Street + 54 Cove Street | Portland
DEANSSWEETS.COM | @DEANSSWEETS

Dean and Kristin Bingham hand-dip their confections in Portland, using hyper-local ingredients like sea salt from Marshfield and maple syrup tapped in Madison. Visit on Fore or Cove Street for a truffle or bonbon.

4. THE YARD

"EXTREME HOT CHOCOLATE"

82 Hanover Street, Suite 7 | Portland
YARDPORTLAND.COM/MENU
@THEYARDPORTLAND

If the thought of toffee nut hot chocolate tickles your taste buds, you'll want to visit The Yard restaurant in Portland, where they've concocted a dizzying menu of Extreme Hot Chocolate Boards. 21+? Enjoy spiked.

5. LENNY THE MOOSE

419 US Route 1 | Scarborough
LENLIBBY.COM/PAGES/LENNY-THE-MOOSE
@LENLIBBYCANDIESMAINE

It's only fitting that the world's only life-sized chocolate moose resides in Maine. "Lenny" was crafted with 1,700 pounds of chocolate, and has been delighting visitors at Len Libby Candies in Scarborough since 1997.

6. WRIGHT CHOCOLATE HOUSE

427 Stone Hill Road ...
moving to 24 Main Street | Limerick
WRIGHTCHOCOLATEHOUSE.COM
@WRIGHTCHOCOLATEHOUSE

Chocolatier Lynn Wright designs traditional confections (using local ingredients and exceptional French chocolate) at the Wright Chocolate House—soon moving to a historic building in the quaint town of Limerick! Visit wrightchocolatehouse.com to plan your visit.