

The Weekly Calistoga

ST. HELENA STAR

Chocolates ‘Flourish’ in Calistoga

By Cynthia Sweeney | Feb 6, 2019

It’s the classic gift with a handmade, local, touch. While the confections at Flourish Chocolate may be a little decadent, there is also a health-conscious, cancer-preventative aspect to the operation.

Holly Peterson’s chocolate-making kitchen is tucked away on Wappo Avenue just off Lincoln Avenue. She started in the new space about a year ago, armed with the best chocolate she could source, and a tempering machine that makes all the difference with a chocolate that is smooth, delicate, and balanced in flavors.



“I’m always looking for elegance but I want it to be pleasurable. I don’t want it to knock you over,” she said. However, “The milk chocolate hazelnut praline is intense. It’s a pretty decadent one, I have to say.”

Same goes for the coconut. Almond Joy has its place, but not here.

“I just wanted it to be creamy, silky,” Peterson said, and it is.

“All the chocolate, all the ingredients are organic and the best I can get.”

The chocolates start at about \$17 for a box of six, and Peterson, sadly, (or maybe it’s a good thing for some of us), does not sell directly out of the shop. She has a store on her website, chefhollypeterson.com and takes special orders by phone, 942-9494.

There are also chocolate golf balls, and a barrel collection, with cocktails inside, like a Manhattan, Sambuca and rum, but with the alcohol cooked off.

(Author’s note about the passionfruit filling: I spent 23 years in Hawaii. I know my passionfruit. This filling sent me reeling to the backroads of Hilo. I just about cried with happiness. Peterson said, however, she will never

divulge the recipe. “I learned a special technique in Belgium on how to bring out the passionfruit flavor.”)

Peterson is noted for her Robin’s Eggs which have a delicate outer shell, like a real Robin’s egg, and are filled with cancer-preventative ingredients. All have a white chocolate turmeric Grenache center, and flavors also include saffron, cinnamon, citrus, grated tangerine zest, salted walnut, and ginger, in which she infuses fresh ginger into the cream with a little cube of candied ginger.

The actual health benefits of the Robin’s Eggs may be symbolic, but Peterson donates 10 percent of those sales to the American Institute of Cancer Research in the area of food research.

A nose for chocolate

Peterson will be familiar to some in the Napa Valley. She studied wine at U.C. Davis, trained as a chef in France, and back in Napa Valley, she worked as an executive chef at Mondavi Winery. She was also on the opening team at the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone, where she wrote curriculum and taught for about 14 years.

The chocolate business is very similar to the wine business, she said. Just as wineries source from vineyards all over, it’s the same with chocolate. Each company has hundreds of cocoa forests to choose from in each chocolate category; dark, milk, and white.

One of the things Peterson is proud of is not only the flavor her chocolate has, but the “shine and snap.”



Snap refers to the delicate, satisfying crack the chocolate makes when bitten into. Getting the smooth, glossy, evenly colored coating takes skill in tempering, or slowly heating and cooling the chocolate. (She named her tempering machine Lorenzo.) With a shiny, flawless appearance, tempered chocolate melts smoothly in your mouth, allowing you to fully enjoy the flavor.

“You can see they’re really shiny. The delicacy of the chocolate is something I was looking for, and I needed to find my signature chocolate,” Peterson said.

To find that signature flavor, Peterson’s wine training and experience in judging wine kicked in.

“I blind-tasted 300 chocolates and it took me two weeks. I did it in flights of 10. It was so fascinating,” she said.

All of her favorites, and the winner, are made from African beans.

“I kept going for that African chocolate, hands down. Nothing

was even close. It was the clear winner for my palate,” she said. “What I like about it is that it’s dark. It’s rich, emollient. It’s creamy. It has bitterness but it’s not an aggressive bitterness. And it’s not acidic. It’s not chalky.”

Cancer connection

A number of years ago, Peterson started planning and organizing custom wine events, like special dinners at wineries.

“People started finding me because I’m good with wine and food pairings. It’s not catering, where they have set menus, everything is tailored to the wine served at that event. And also I’m happy to speak publicly (at the events),” she said. “It’s my own little niche.”

These venues include large charity events like Napa Valley’s V Foundation for Cancer Research, where not long ago she was asked to make some chocolates.

The event announced a new fund in honor of Robin Roberts, a member of the Foundation’s Board of Directors and co-anchor of ABC’s “Good Morning America.”

That’s when Peterson came up with the idea for Robin’s Eggs that have cancer-preventative ingredients.

They were a big hit.

“They said ‘this should be a business. This is way better than just a one-time offering.’ I got so many positive comments about it,” Peterson said, adding, “Robin’s Eggs tend to be very popular gifts for friends who are struggling with cancer. It’s a handshake or a hug to say ‘hey, we’re with you, (and because funds are donated to cancer research) we’re working on this behind the scenes,’... here’s a pretty little chocolate that I hope makes your day go well, and I hope makes you feel happy today.”

Peterson also learned that dark chocolate helps take away the metallic taste that chemotherapy leaves in your mouth.

She said the venture has been very rewarding.

“I’ll get little notes from people who, someone gave them the chocolates that say ‘you know dear, I just want to tell you how that just brightened my day.’ It gets to me.”

The last day to ship for Valentine’s Day arrival is Sunday, Feb. 10. Orders can also be arranged to be picked up between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.

