



A pod shouldn't fall far from the tree

By Jessica Pedemont
Chocolate Artisan

Upon my return to Sydney from tropical Hawaii, I took a handful of Madre Chocolate bean-to-bars and ate my way back to inspiration.

With a sub-brand named Chocolate Artisan, you shouldn't be surprised I am a firm supporter of quality couverture. However, after visiting cacao plantations in the Island of O'ahu, Hawaii, I have gained a heightened understanding of what quality actually entails.

As part of my travels to the US, I was lucky enough to crack open a ripe cacao pod on the trunk of a tree, eat the pulpy sweet tropical fruity flesh in the sun and spit the seed on the ground – thanks to Hawaiian chocolate brand Madre Chocolate.

Madre Chocolate purchases dried, fermented beans directly from farmers and co-operatives and then roasts and processes the beans in small batches to craft chocolate bars. It is even planning to plant its own trees and grow the beans from scratch. The people behind the multi-award winning brand are cocoa-fanatics and their commitment to control the bean-to-bar process results in a super-fresh product.

Their passion reiterates the notion that chocolate is all about the bean; from the way it is raised, to the soil it's grown in and to the weather it thrives on or survives through. Every aspect of the bean needs to be considered if quality chocolate is to be achieved. It is effected by how it is harvested, fermented and dried. It is effected by how it is roasted, how it is ground and the additional ingredients added to the recipe. At the end of the day, nothing can mask or cure a poor-quality bean.

Throughout my career, I've been asked to try many chocolate bars, to taste bean quality and to match dried beans along side the finished product to ensure a thorough analysis. My findings never shocked anyone, or shouldn't have anyway – good beans lead to a good chocolate bar.

A fond memory from my trip to O'ahu was when Dr Nat Bletter, co-founder and chocolate 'flavourmeister', came to pick me up in his car. He needed to push over one of the sacks of freshly roasted beans so I could have a seat and the



aroma immersed my senses and sent my mind into a heady haze of happiness for the half-an-hour drive.

For pastry chefs, the act of watching chocolate being made is almost a religious ritual. We watch with great pleasure at how chocolate morphs and evolves, getting better and better and changing until it is just perfect. However, nothing has put a smile on my face more quickly than being given the opportunity to get up close and personal with cacao in its most natural and raw state. As a chocolatier, I was genuinely thrilled.

I've noticed a great shift in trends regarding chocolate these days. More people, chocolate producers and consumers alike, are interested in a product's freshness and where it has come from. People want fair trade and a lot of professionals, myself included, respect this.

Madre Chocolate's quest is to make truly amazing chocolate, driven by passion, in a sustainable way. By doing so, the talented team behind the brand believe they can inspire a greater consumer appreciation for cacao's rich cultural heritage and an understanding of the ecological and social

issues surrounding the natural resource. By using organic, fair trade chocolate, Madre Chocolate is connecting consumers with the food source and, in doing so, contributing to the well-being of the cacao farmers and their communities.

But can one have too much of a good thing? One of my travel companions, Nat, has a Ph.D. in ethnobotany [the scientific study of relationships between people and plants]. He explained how lightly processed cacao preserves healthy antioxidants, while still providing a rich, deep flavour. Most other chocolates that are heavily processed cannot boast this health angle because heavy fermenting and roasting destroys many of the antioxidants.

This is an interesting point to consider and perhaps a discussion for future issues of *Australian Baking Business*.

For chocolatiers, as well as bakers and pastry chefs, the background of chocolate should be fascinating. If you would like to learn more about cacao, or to make a culinary sabbatical to the glorious Island of O'ahu, check out the Madre Chocolate website. Enjoy! ■