

# Sweet dreams

As Easter approaches, we meet an artisan chocolatier – and try one of her delicious recipes. By **Jane Swift**

**C**aramel, praline and sea salt has been the bestselling chocolate for the past five years, and is still the bestseller now. The chocolate industry is very slow to innovate! confides Isabelle Chappell, chocolatier and owner of Chocolat Chocolat. Although customers like what they know and know what they like, Isabelle has always been adventurous, and keen to push the boundaries.

Before becoming a chocolatier, Isabelle worked for the fashion company Monsoon Accessorize. 'I was International Director, opening shops around the world,' she says. 'But I found I'd had enough of travelling; my children were at home and I was living out of a suitcase. So we made a change and moved to Paris. I was looking for something different to do and kept coming back to the idea of chocolate.'

She enrolled on a chocolate course, was immediately hooked, and did more training in Belgium and France. In those countries, it's commonplace to make chocolate on the shop premises. 'It's like real theatre, making chocolate in front of customers,' Isabelle enthuses, 'so when I opened up my shop in the UK I saw the possibilities in this; there was nothing like what I wanted to do in the UK at that time.'

Chocolat Chocolat in Cambridge has been open now for eight years, and Isabelle has capitalised on the movement towards making shopping more of an experience. 'You have to make customers want to come to

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**ISABELLE CHAPPELL**  
Chocolatier and  
chocolate shop owner

the shops instead of shopping online,' Isabelle explains. 'To see the chocolate being made, actually in the shop window, and then 20 minutes later to be able to eat that chocolate is a real experience.'

Isabelle's speciality is sheet chocolate with fresh ingredients sprinkled on top. 'The key is flavour,' she affirms. 'For example, I make a white chocolate with sweet raspberries and crunchy pistachios. But chocolate is really subjective – you have to buy what you enjoy!' For herself, that's coffee-flavoured chocolate. 'I have two favourites: my normal, everyday, 70% dark chocolate with coffee and espresso, and a chocolate called Café Latte, which is Madagascan white chocolate with coffee and amoretto in it.'

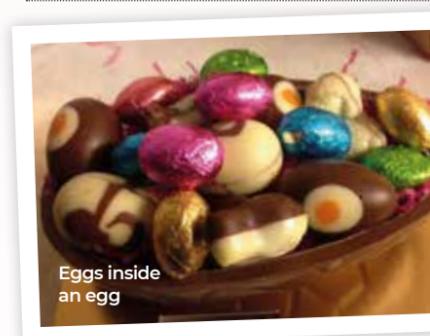
Historically, the British palate has been brought up on milk chocolate with a low cocoa content. However, tastes have changed, particularly in the past five years, and more people are now buying dark chocolate. 'There are a lot more people buying for vegans, too,' says

Isabelle, 'and there seems to have been an increase in allergies, so those who are lactose intolerant have dark chocolate, or coconut milk, and about 70% of everything we sell is gluten-free.'

Making chocolate that tastes good is Isabelle's priority, but she also believes in the importance of beautiful packaging. 'I lived in France for a long time, and my family is French. They have lovely packaging there and free gift wrapping. That's what I wanted in my shop. I like the chocolates to be beautifully presented, and packaged so that they can be seen.'



Beautiful  
packaging  
is important



Eggs inside  
an egg

In addition to managing her shop, Isabelle runs chocolate tastings and courses. 'Five years ago, a ladies group asked me to hold a chocolate talk and tasting, and the courses side of the business grew from there.' Courses include tastings, an introduction to chocolate making, corporate courses, children's parties, and chocolate and wine tastings for groups. 'I did 100 courses last year!' Isabelle exclaims. 'And we're also distributing our own brand to independent chocolate shops around the UK.'

Running her own business hasn't always been plain sailing though, and in 2009, the economic situation meant the closure of Chocolat Chocolat's second shop, in London. 'That was hard,' Isabelle reveals. 'I had staff working in the shop who lost their jobs, but there will always be ups and downs with running your own business.'

Chocolat Chocolat is a family business, with Isabelle's husband managing the accounts and marketing, and although their children are now grown up, Isabelle's youngest daughter is interested in the trade. 'She used to be my Saturday girl, and she learnt to make chocolate – I trained her. She's getting other experience now,' Isabelle continues, 'but I'm hoping that one day she'll take over the business.'

In the meantime, Isabelle is enjoying her expanding and diverging business – and one of the best things is the necessary taste tests: 'We do have to try our chocolate,' she laughs, 'and I have a very short memory; I have to try it again and again just to make sure I like it!'



One Townswoman can win a chocolate bouquet. Send your name, address, phone number and member ID, on a postcard marked 'CHOC' to **Think, Capital House, 25 Chapel Street, London NW1 5DH** or by email to **tgprizedraws@thinkpublishing.co.uk**. Entries should arrive before 11.59pm on **31 March 2018**.



## MAKE ISABELLE'S SALTED CARAMEL TRUFFLES

(Makes 30-40 chocolates)

### INGREDIENTS

- 400g Chocolat Chocolat caramel chocolate buttons
- 175ml whipping cream
- 5g (1 level tsp) sea salt
- good-quality cocoa powder for dusting

### METHOD

1. Place the buttons in a glass bowl over a pan of gently simmering water until melted, then take off the pan.
2. In a small saucepan, mix the cream and the sea salt and then bring to the boil, simmer for one minute and then leave to cool slightly (about three minutes).
3. Pour the cream onto the melted chocolate, stirring it in gently but quickly until the ganache is smooth and glossy.
4. Let the ganache cool for 15-20 minutes, then cover and leave in the fridge for at least three hours, or overnight if possible, to set.
5. When the ganache is set, spoon out truffle-sized amounts of the

mixture and place onto a baking sheet or tray covered with a sheet of greaseproof paper.

6. Using your fingertips, shape the truffles gently into a ball and then place the tray back in the fridge for 15-20 minutes.
7. Drop a truffle into a small bowl of cocoa powder and roll it around gently until completely coated, then place the freshly dusted truffles onto a clean sheet of greaseproof paper. Store in an airtight container, and eat and enjoy within three or four days.



Cocoa-dusted  
salted  
caramel  
truffles

## ISABELLE'S TIPS

- Always melt chocolate using a bain-marie or double saucepan.
- Never let the water boil or touch the base of your glass bowl as this will burn your chocolate.
- Do not allow steam to discolour the chocolate.
- Do not add water or fat to chocolate unless the recipe specifies this.

- Do not pour boiling cream onto chocolate.
- Roll the truffles quickly in your hands or they will begin to melt and lose their shape.
- Store the finished truffles in an airtight container in a cool place.

