

Great expectations realized

By Curtis Vreeland // CONTRIBUTOR

The Big Chocolate Show lived up to its name.

Held Oct. 6-8 at the Terminal Stores, New York City, the show offered its attendees access to stellar chocolate makers, chefs, authors, and equipment suppliers from around the world. Ticketed master tasting classes provided showgoers the promise of a deep dive into the rich diversity of chocolate, on such topics as pairing chocolate and cheese or chocolate and spirits and sampling chocolate made of Hawaiian beans. A performance stage offered demonstrations and a forum for lively dialog.

Now in its second year, more than 4,000 attended the show. It is a successor — but under different ownership — to the Salon du Chocolat, which was last held in New York in the bleak aftermath of Hurricane Sandy in 2015.

“Year Two definitely demonstrated some important trends: vegan and raw chocolate, better quality milk and dark milk chocolate, and the explosion

of chocolate companies in Ecuador. Our show is really a microcosm of the premium chocolate industry today,” notes show director Alexandra Leaf.

One of those stellar chocolate makers was Idilio Origins. The Basel, Switzerland-based chocolate maker specializes in single origins and superior varieties (like criollo) and uses a long conch method to bring out the bean’s flavors.

Pascal Wirth, one of the company’s partners, is an architect by trade. They initially established Idilio to provide gifts for corporate clients. His clients were in for a real treat, as the company has won awards for every chocolate it has submitted to competitions. This year, for example, it earned seven awards at the 2017 International Chocolate Awards, including for the *Porcelana Criollo Puro* (74%) dark bar with Venezuelan cacao, which was available for tasting. It was a mouthful of red fruit flavors and delivered an incredibly long finish. www.idilio.ch

Another chocolate maker was Castronovo Chocolate, whose co-owner/

chocolate maker Denise Castronovo was on hand. Dark milk bars are the company’s specialty. Her chocolates have won 43 international awards.

Among the samples available for tasting was the *Sierra Nevada Colombia Dark Milk Bar* (63%) made with Trinitario and Criollo cacao. Last year, that bar won gold medals at both the International Chocolate Awards and Academy of Chocolate. Castronovo is launching a new line, to be called Signature Collection, that will showcase some of the best cacao she can source, “a top shelf chocolate line,” she elaborated. Hurricane Irma, fortunately, did not affect the Stuart, Florida-based chocolate maker.

www.CastronovoChocolate.com

Milk chocolate was well represented at the show. Villars, which is a Fribourg, Switzerland-based chocolate maker, displayed its new Swiss milk chocolate terroir collection. Each of the three bars in the collection features milk from a different canton, each with its own “single origin” flavor: Luzern (full-bodied and velvety), Fribourg (creamy and caramelized), and Bern (milky and smooth).

“Villars works exclusively with small family farms that maintain traditional methods, to ensure the environment is preserved and the milk retains its flavors,” explains Carolina Gavet, marketing manager, whose company, Chocolate Stars, import Villars. The bar’s cacao content remains about 33 percent.

www.ChocolateStarsUSA.com.

Another milk chocolate exhibitor was Chef Johnny Iuzzini who showed off two dark milk bars. www.JohnnyIuzzini.com.



Pascal Wirth is partner of Idilio Chocolate, a Swiss company that earned seven awards at the 2017 International Chocolate Awards.



Denise Castronovo, co-owner of Castronovo Chocolate, said the company’s specialty is dark milk chocolate bars.



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The growing ascendancy of Ecuador as a serious producer of fine chocolate was evident in the participation of 14 producer/exhibitors from that country. “Our producers are so much more sophisticated now; having gained [critical] knowledge in roasting profiles and other processes,” says Tania Molina, founder and owner of Villakuyaya.

And access to different flavor profiles depending upon the beans’ terroir. Take these two 100 percent Arriba Nacional cacao bars. Villakuyaya’s beans are grown at a low altitude along the coast in Esmeraldas. It had ripe banana and raspberry flavors.

Minka’s 100 percent bar used beans from Hacienda Guantupi, La Mana, Cotopaxi District located at 2,400 feet. The bar had pronounced “citrus and passion fruit” flavors, says Ricardo Aulestia, brand representative. These unique chocolate tasting opportunities were one reason why attending the show was so educationally satisfying. www.villakuyaya.com and www.Minka.ec.

Another show delight was tasting chocolates from two chocolate makers of Indian descent who have

incorporated traditional flavors from their Indian heritage.

Bittersweet NYC was co-founded by Surbhi Sahni, a pastry chef with more than 15 years’ experience, including at Tulsi, a one-star Michelin restaurant in New York City. One of her signature Indian-inspired sweet lines is a remix of *burfi*, a confection made with *khoya* (a type of condensed milk), often flavored with pistachio and/or cardamom, and topped with a thin layer of edible metallic leaf.

Burfi are very popular during Diwali, the Hindi Festival of Lights (Oct. 19). Sahni explained that, as her reputation and popularity of Indian food in general has spread, her clients have shifted from entirely South Asian to now 30 percent American. www.BittersweetNYC.com

Alak Vasa took a more traditional approach to matching her roots with chocolate making. Kearny, N.J.-based Elements Truffles specializes in Ayurveda-inspired artisan chocolate. Ayurveda, considered as the sister science to yoga, focuses on purity and minimalism of ingredients. All of Elements’ chocolates are free from dairy and any refined sugar or lecithin. They are uniquely flavored with pure essential oils.

An example is the *Orange Pistachio Truffle with Turmeric Infusion*. The bar’s tasting notes state that the bar is “bold, lethargy buster, and anti-inflammatory. With the decadent overtone of orange and cured pistachios, this is chef’s personal favorite.” All the bars use 70 percent raw cacao. Elements Truffles donates 25 percent of net profit towards education of underprivileged children. www.ElementsTruffles.com

Other raw chocolate makers were Rawclates from Brooklyn, NY (www.Rawclates.com) and Amore di Mona from Louisville, KY, (www.amoredimona.com).

Chocolate and spirits seemed to be a popular match-up. R.M. Peluso was at the event to showcase her new book, *Deep Tasting Chocolate & Whiskey*, available next month. Peluso has been a chocolate reviewer/contributor on C-Spot for over ten years and is author of *Deep Tasting: A Chocolate Lover’s Guide to Meditation*.

She explained that her new book contains 140 “superb” whiskey and chocolate flavor matches and provided one teaser pairing: 70%+ dark chocolate and truffles are best paired with bourbon and spirits at least 90 proof. Available this November from publisher www.ritualcommunications.com

Due to the show’s success, expect a bigger venue and more surprises next year.

Curtis Vreeland, president of Vreeland & Associates (www.vreelandassociates.com), specializes in confectionery market research. He has been spotting trends in the premium confectionery sector for *Candy Industry Magazine* for years. ☺



Villakuyaya’s founder and owner Tania Molina.



Bittersweet NYC’s co-founder Surbhi Sahni.



Elements Truffle’s bar selection.