

# The New York Times

By ALLEN SALKIN

Published: January 7, 2007



## NO GOLDEN TICKET, BUT MORE THAN CANDY

THE workers at Chocolate Bar can tell instantly which of the two types of chocolate eaters they're dealing with when a new customer enters their Greenwich Village shop.

Type 1 buyers are generally more haughty, likely to be wearing black turtlenecks and shoes with sharp heels. They inquire with precision about cacao content, seeking the purest form of their chosen intoxicant. They are directed to the shop's signature line, in particular the 72 percent cacao bar in a no-fills wrapper.

Then there are Type 2 customers, a group more likely to be dressed like struggling artists. They rush giggling to the stencil bars, little tabs of chocolate with simple images of banana-seat bicycles and hot rods on the labels, and retro bars like the milk chocolate with peanut butter caramel filling. Meant to evoke nostalgia for summers past, these candies typically trigger a Type 2 to gush happy memories about puppy dogs and high school boyfriends, said Alison Nelson, the owner of Chocolate Bar.

"They shout out, 'This is cute!'" she said while shelving boxes of chocolate peppermint patty tea on a recent afternoon.

"People want something that speaks about who they are as a person," she said. "It's not just about the chocolate anymore."

How could it be just about the chocolate anymore, with the stakes so high? The premium chocolate market, generally understood to mean products with higher-than-Hershey-bar prices, prime ingredients and upscale packaging, has grown 10.5 percent annually for the last five years and reached \$1.3 billion in sales in 2005, according to Don Montuori, publisher of Packaged Facts, a market research firm.

Now that there are hundreds of chocolate brands competing for a share of that market, upstart chocolate makers are turning to extras, some tangible, others spiritual, to attract attention to their products.

There are the love poems included in every bar of Chocolove, the miniature art reproductions in every Art Bar, the promises to soothe symptoms of PMS and menopause printed on Ecco Bella Health by Chocolate bars, and the pledges that

10 percent of every sale of Endangered Species Chocolate will help save chimpanzees and other animals.

While some chocolate companies battle for finicky Type 1 customers with labels full of information on cacao content and country of origin, others are aiming squarely for the more impulsive Type 2.

"These are, generally speaking, smaller companies that have to have something different and seemingly better than what is already out there to get shelf space and consumer attention," said Joan Steuer, president of Chocolate Marketing, a consulting firm based in Los Angeles.

Chocolate makers are trying to push all the pleasure buttons they can to reach consumers who view chocolate as a luxury, and want every bite to transport them. If that trip happens to be aboard the Love Boat, so much the better.

When Timothy Moley was thinking of starting a candy brand in the mid-1990s, he gathered the most serious chocolate lovers he could find, who all turned out to be women, and asked what chocolate meant to them. "They said eating chocolate is a personal romantic experience," Mr. Moley said by phone from the offices of Chocolove in Boulder, Colo.

He showed the group some potential label images and the one they liked best looked like a love letter from a foreign country, complete with a postmark and a gold seal. He ran with that concept, and now the bar, made of Belgian chocolate, comes with a romantic poem printed inside the label.

Love, starts one by Charles Swain, "is to build with human thoughts a shrine where hope sits brooding."

Other extras are even more ethereal, gentle whispers of chocolate conjuring a connection to a higher power. Packaging for the chai-flavored Dagoba Organic Chocolate, from Ashland, Ore., declares: "Chocolate is sacred. There is an art to the alchemy of flavor infusion, an art we explore with mystery and integrity."

Like early 20th-century tobacco makers who put baseball cards in their packages, the makers of the \$3.29 Art Bar slide a contemporary-art print under the wrapper. Erika Fowler-Decatur, a co-owner of Ithaca Fine Chocolates, which makes the bars, said the company has sold about 300,000 since starting in 2002, but has yet to see a profit. "My background is art history," she said by phone from an art fair in Ithaca, N.Y. "That's how I got into this thing."

Judging from the number of chocolate bars marked as Fair Trade certified or promising to donate some proceeds to charity, the most popular accessory included with chocolate is philanthropy. On the wrapper for Equal Exchange's organic milk chocolate is a drawing of a cacao farmer who looks a lot like the Colombian coffee icon Juan Valdez.

By buying Equal Exchange chocolate, said Gary Goodman, the advertising and promotions manager, "you are helping these farmers in the developing world to build a better life." Indiana-based Endangered Species Chocolate has an ooh-how-cute photo of an infant monkey clinging to its mother's belly on its Supreme Dark Chocolate bar. Renée Sweany, a company spokeswoman, said that sales have been increasing: in 2004, they sold five million bars, which grew to eight million in 2005 and is projected to hit 20 million for 2006.

There is no external audit of the company's charitable giving, but Ms. Sweany said the company gave a total of \$25,000 to charities in 2005 and guaranteed a donation of at least \$25,000 each to two charities in 2006, Chimp Haven and the National Wildlife Federation.

"If you stand in front of a display for chocolate and there are 30 different chocolate bars there, our package stands out," Ms. Sweany said. "It's beautiful, and animals speak to people."

"I suppose if you put pictures of babies on chocolate bars, it might do the same."

This flurry of packaging chocolate with nonchocolate extras, it turns out, is far from a novel concept. In 1868, Richard Cadbury, a London chocolatier who was also an amateur painter, introduced the first heart-shaped Valentine box. It came with a slot in which Mr. Cadbury would insert postcards of his work, usually idyllic scenes of the English countryside, or fluffy white kittens.