

SHOP TALK

comes easily, so we often approach technical challenges in unusual ways.

Business profile: Veruca Chocolates started as a largely online and wholesale business, but over time local customers demanded a retail outlet, so we converted the front portion of our kitchen to a retail store. We have large windows that let in lovely light. When customers enter, they can see us working on the behind the counter, so it's a nice connection for them to see our process— they often ask what we're making, watch how we do things, and sample what we're making. The location is off-the-beaten-path, on the border of the Bucktown and Logan Square neighborhoods in Chicago. Our look is contemporary, with a clean design featuring the company colors: bright pink and dark chocolate brown. Despite the success of our retail store, the bulk of our business is through our website, where we've developed quite a national following.

Pricing: We sell packaged chocolates and, in our retail store, by the piece. Single pieces start at \$1.65, and packaged chocolates run from \$3.25 for a single Gourmet S'more to \$95 for an assorted, four-layer gift box of bonbons. Our most popular offering is a nine-piece assortment of our signature bonbons.

Chocolate varieties: We have both signature, year-round collections as well as seasonal/holiday chocolates, including bonbons, caramels, turtles, gourmet s'mores and bars. We do specialty-shape chocolates for Halloween (Spider Web Bars, Spicy Caramel Skulls), Hanukkah (Gelt for Grown-Ups™), Christmas (Bag of Coal dark truffles, Christmas Trees) and Easter (The Golden Egg, a multi-layer egg with caramel, ganache and crunchy layers).

Chocolate brands: We largely use the E. Guittard line, both for its well rounded flavors, ease of use in production and the company's commitment to Fair Trade practices.

Signature chocolate: Our assorted bonbons are most representative of our style— colorful and boldly decorated shapes with flavors such as Brown Butter, Blackened Sugar, Caramelized White Chocolate-Bourbon-Lime, Mango & Passion Fruit and more.

Most unique piece: Our Gelt for Grown-Ups™ is a modern, no-foil version of Hanukkah gelt that is modeled from an actual ancient Judean coin dating back to the 4th Century BCE. We offer three flavors: Dark Chocolate with Sea Salt, Dark Chocolate with Cacao Nibs, Milk Chocolate— each available in a clear four-ounce box. Our gelt combines history with modern technique and design like no other.

Personal favorite: I love our bonbons – for me, they are the epitome of the combination of artistic creation, exquisite palate and technical challenge.



Veruca Chocolates

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Chocolate philosophy: I think a lot about the whole experience of eating chocolate, from start to finish. So, I put a lot of thought not only into the flavor, texture and look of the chocolates, but also into the packaging, colors and coordination. Our rule regarding flavors is that we only sell what we love to eat. I am also nostalgic, so many of our products are re-creations of some of my childhood favorites: s'mores and turtles, to name a couple.

Inspiration: My curiosity was first piqued when a good friend was a student at the French Pastry School in Chicago. While the pastries that she brought over each week were delightful, I found the chocolates stunning and surprising. Until that point, I really hadn't known anything about how chocolate was made, and she convinced me to take the first step of taking a course. Even though I took my first chocolate making course in the midst of a different career, the feeling that I had when I worked with chocolate stuck with me. I loved the artistic side of chocolate – I still consider it a medium that takes to flavor, color and texture in the most amazing ways. Also, I also really enjoy the simplicity of creating things for others to enjoy.

Training: I began with a week-long beginner course at the French Pastry School in Chicago while I was still practicing medicine. Since then, I've taken classes through L'Ecole Chocolat and the Callebaut Academy in Chicago. The bulk of my training has been hands-on, through trial and error. Because I have less formal training, thinking outside the box





Shipping: We ship throughout the U.S. via UPS, employing insulated boxes with ice during warm months. In Chicago we often use a local service for faster delivery.

How does your shop differ from others? When visitors enter our shop, they're essentially walking in to a full-fledged production kitchen. Customers love watching the chocolates being made and often ask about our process, how the machinery works, or what products we're working on. This creates an interactive experience that makes our customers even more excited to walk out with a retail purchase, and it helps forge stronger relationships with our customers.



Motto: There are two. The company byline is "I want it now," an homage to the *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* character, Veruca Salt, the company's namesake. I feel this way about chocolate and we try to create confections that others will feel that way about. Our production motto is "We only sell what we love to eat." My team and I won't release a new product until it's good enough to make us crave it. If it can't pass that test, it doesn't deserve to be passed on to our customers

