



Raising the bar

MEET A CHOCOLATE CURATOR AND THE
WINNERS OF NEW ZEALAND'S INAUGURAL
AWARDS AND FIND OUT WHAT IT TAKES TO
MAKE REALLY GOOD CHOCOLATE

WORDS ANNA TAIT-JAMIESON



Honest Chocolat: Nico Bonnaud

SUPREME WINNER

Honest Chocolat

Gold Award: Salted Caramel and Buckwheat Milk Chocolate Tablet

Gold Award: Salted Caramel Chocolate Bonbon

Silver Award: Blueberry and Raspberry 66% Chocolate Tablet

CHOCOLATE AND BUCKWHEAT? It's an unlikely combination but add a touch of crushed caramel and, in the hands of chocolatier Nico Bonnaud, it's an absolute winner. Literally. Honest Chocolat's Salted Caramel and Buckwheat Milk Chocolate Tablet was judged best in its class and crowned joint supreme winner at the NZ Chocolate Awards 2017.

Chief judge and chocolate importer Luke Owen Smith scored it highly for originality. "The buckwheat is so unusual, but it worked really well with the smooth milk chocolate. And the caramel flavour with the milk chocolate and the savoury buckwheat nuttiness ... it was all-round delicious and interesting. A unique creation."

Innovative combinations and natural flavourings are a hallmark of Nico's style. A French-trained chef de pâtisserie, he is one of a new generation of chocolatiers bringing fresh ideas to a traditional craft.

He says he has always loved chocolate, perhaps because he was brought up in a country where every town has a chocolate boutique. "It's very much part of day-to-day life."

Those early beginnings led to a career that took him across the globe to work alongside celebrated chefs such as Peter Gordon and Pierre Gagnaire. He came to New Zealand 11 years ago to work at luxury lodge Kauri Cliffs. These days, he lives at Snells Beach with his wife and business partner Emily Bonnaud. The couple set up Honest Chocolat two years ago. It was an opportunity for Nico to do things his way – starting with a commitment to using only organic, ethically sourced, single-origin chocolate.

Most chocolatiers focus almost entirely on what they can add to the chocolate. Nico's approach is quite different. "It's all about the flavour of the chocolate, we use other flavours to complement that." For example, his silver award winning bar is made with blueberries and raspberries because they match the flavour profile of his 66 per cent dark chocolate. "That particular chocolate is very fruity, slightly earthy and quite unique because it's from Bolivia and includes wild harvest beans."

For similar reasons, he uses a rare technique to make dairy-free chocolates by substituting water for cream or butter in the ganache. "The idea is to showcase the chocolate. It brings it forward and it's a cleaner flavour because the dairy doesn't coat your palate. But you need a really good chocolate because there is nowhere to hide."

Until recently, Nico was handcrafting chocolates in his garage at home but in October last year, he and Emily imported a high-tech tempering machine and opened their own workshop and chocolate boutique at Matakana. Designed by Emily to reflect the organic nature of the business, the store features pale wooden cabinetry, dark green walls and a tropical ceiling that's papered with parrots and monkeys – a nod to the rainforest origins of the finest cacao.

Currently, he's using chocolate from Ecuador, Bolivia, the Amazon and Congo to make an impressive range of tablets, bonbons and lollipops. The flavours are intriguing: think candied orange and sesame, lemon and pistachio, raspberry and pink peppercorn. And the ingredients are all natural: cocoa solids, cocoa butter and real flavourings.

Nothing else, just Honest Chocolat.



Honest Chocolat's standard collection is available online and in specialty stores and cafés around the country. Special editions, spiced hot chocolate and cold-brew cacao are in-store only at the Matakana Village chocolate boutique. honestchocolat.com