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BOXING CLEVER: Kitty with packages and Advent calendar

These women all make a living from their love of one of the world's favourite sweet treats

THE DESIGNER

KITTY ARDEN, from west London, is an award-winning packaging designer for high-end chocolate maker Prestat

I WAS 10 years old when I first encountered Prestat chocolates. My older sister worked in one of its shops in London and would bring home beautifully wrapped truffles.

The packaging was much darker then and had little or no decoration. As a child I was always interested

in colours and would constantly sketch pictures. Both of my parents are artistic. While dad was more construction focused, mum worked in tapestry.

While studying textiles at Chelsea and Camberwell art schools my creations were always considered a little bit eccentric by my teachers.

I went on to work as an artist and designer and when Prestat approached me to design its packaging in 1990, I didn't hesitate in saying yes.

The first packaging I designed was a bright pink jewel box with gold swirls, which is still my favourite.

I wanted the receiver to feel they were receiving jewellery to create that excitement of a luxury present.

The Prestat swirl on my packaging has been a constant theme over the past 12 years because the shape represents mixing milk into chocolate.

When designing new packaging the first step is finding out how many chocolates it needs to house so I can decide the shape and size of the box.

I am involved in every aspect of the design process from producing rough sketches to choosing colours.

When it comes to the colours I've always drawn a lot of inspiration from a fairground I visited in Seville, Spain.

I thoroughly enjoyed designing this year's Advent calendar.

It makes me happy knowing I bring a splash of colour to people's lives.

● prestat.co.uk

THE CHOCOLATIER

AMELIA ROPE, 42, below, from south London, is founder of the Amelia Rope Chocolate company

I'VE always loved cooking and realised I wanted to work with chocolate after appearing as a contestant on the BBC cookery show Masterchef in 2006.

I got kicked out in the second round but co-host John Torode told me I had unique ideas and shouldn't give up.

I quit my job working in a doctor's surgery, sold my flat and enrolled on a one week Les Bonbons de Chocolat course at Valrhona in France where I worked with chocolate from all over the world.

Back in London and keen to break into food journalism, I delivered a box of my home-made butter-free mint truffles to a food magazine editor.

On trying them, he ordered me to forget journalism because I was the next Juliette Binoche, who starred in Chocolat, which was a lovely compliment.

In my spare time I made my own truffles and crystallised rose petals from a rented kitchen in London's Borough Market and even had an order for 1,000 petals from a Middle-Eastern royal family. I lived in my kitchen for a week to complete it.

When a businessman friend told me I should make a marketable product such as a chocolate bar I thought it was a bit boring but he persisted and in 2007 gave me six weeks' notice to design and produce 1,000 bars for his website. I

IT'S A WRAP: Amelia with her own chocolates

Pictures: DANIEL LYNCH
Hair and make-up: SOPHIE WHEATER
Styling: JERRY KHAN



WE'RE THE QUEENS OF CHOCOLATE

had to create the recipe, design the packaging and deliver them. It was hard work but a great buzz.

That first bar was made from 70 per cent Mexican chocolate wrapped in simple craft paper and bright foil to add colour.

I also started selling to local retailers in Battersea, south London, who showed interest in a milk chocolate bar, so I created my Pale Edition 01.

On a whim I dropped off a

batch at Selfridges in 2010 thinking I was never going to get anywhere but the buyer requested 600 100g bars, which sold for £5.95 each. I was thrilled.

My chocolate is expensive because I am using good quality ingredients but you should need only one or two chunks to satisfy you.

Having originally trained as an aromatherapist, I drew on that knowledge to expand my flavours to include dark mandarin, rose, peppermint and lemon and sea salt, and by 2011 my bars were stocked in Whole Foods and Liberty in London.

My sales this year have doubled

compared to last year and Liberty is one of my best retailers, which is great news. However, that does come with challenges.

There is so much juggling that goes on. If one supplier is delayed it throws out all of my production. I've moved home 15 times in 15 months and managed to take only three days holiday this year.

But I'm thrilled that customers love my chocolate and that makes it all worthwhile.

● ameliarope.com

Interviews by SOPHIE DONNELLY

THE SCIENTIST

HAYLEIGH PERKS, 25, of Birmingham, left, has worked at Cadbury since her teens

I HAVE my first taste of chocolate at 10.30am most days, followed by a bar at lunch and one more in the evening.

It's every woman's dream but for me it's my job. I started working at Cadbury World as a tour guide at the age of 19.

I loved it but during one shift I saw an advertisement for a trainee chocolate development technologist.

The company wanted someone with a science qualification so I agreed to study for A-levels in chemistry and biology alongside the job.

Now, five years later, I specialise in Cadbury Dairy Milk, or CDM to those in the know.

It's not just about tasting

chocolate. I temper it, which means controlling the temperature while it heats up and cools down to ensure a glossy finish and a consistent taste.

It can be a demanding job. Chocolate tests my patience all the time. Anything can affect it, such as the slightest change in room temperature.

It's my job to create slightly different types of CDM to match up with new ingredients, such as toffee popcorn and golden biscuit crunch.

I fly all over the world tweaking recipes to suit different climates. In the past year I have travelled to Canada, India and Brazil.

Chocolate melts at 37 degrees, which could be the midday temperature in India so we alter the characteristics to compensate, such as including harder fat to raise the melting

temperature. Even Irish Dairy Milk tastes different to ours. It's more like our Twirl bars due to the milk they use. They have more rain in Ireland so their dairy is slightly different.

You would think I'd get sick of eating chocolate but it's the exact opposite. Once I smell it I have to have it but I do limit myself.

Luckily we have a gym on site but I don't go as much as I should.

As my boyfriend also works for Cadbury in the printing department we make it a rule never to have any sweet things in the house.

What's lovely is that my nan used to work for Cadbury on the assortment line and a lot of my dad's friends work in the factory. It's a community I'm honoured to be a part of.

● cadbury.co.uk

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