

Meet the producer

'My background in aromatherapy is vital'

Chocolatier Amelia Rope is fascinated by the flavour combinations possible with her favourite ingredient

From the beginning, I've pushed my brand. I want it to become the most luxurious chocolate ever! My palate and my imagination are my most important tools. I make chocolate that I would want to eat - if I find it addictive, I think other people will too.

Before becoming a chocolatier, I had been a PA for about 15 years, but I had always been interested in nutrition and was qualified as an aromatherapist. One night I was watching MasterChef and I thought: I'm gonna go for it. I managed to win the restaurant round, before being booted off. Backstage, presenter John Torode said: "Your mind and the way you use it is unique. You must go and get trained." I did a five-day chocolate course in Verona and was mesmerised.

I set up Amelia Rope Chocolate in 2007, with very little money and no experience. I started with truffles and petals coated in chocolate and gold leaf. An entrepreneur friend of mine, Pat Reeves, kept suggesting I produce something more marketable and scalable, such as chocolate bars, but I was reluctant. Then one day Pat placed an order for 1,000 Mexican 70% dark chocolate bars and gave me six weeks to figure out how to make and deliver them. Instead of paying me in cash, he gave me back the chocolate bars to sell. I did, and two months later I introduced a milk chocolate bar. I dropped them off at a luxury department store in London and they took them. From there, I started introducing more flavours.

My background in aromatherapy is vital to the way I create recipes. I let the oils sit in the chocolate. Some oils, such as dark lemon, are very heavy and sit right at the bottom. They're very subtle and leave you with a clean palette. Others, such as dark ginger, sit in the middle. You get a hit of chocolate, then ginger, then you finish with both chocolate and ginger. And then others, such as dark peppermint and pale rose, are very intense and sit right at the top.

When I think of a new flavour, I have to start working on it there and then. I don't have a favourite bar - my taste is so fickle. For energy, I have dark peppermint or dark coffee bean, then, in the afternoon, I'll have a chunk of pale rose. At the moment I can't stop eating my White Edition 02 (white chocolate and sea salt). There's no way one can say white chocolate is healthy, so I'm trying to wean myself off it ...



INTERVIEW BY DALE BERNING SAWA, PHOTOGRAPHY OWEN RICHARDS

DONNA HAY'S WHITE CHOCOLATE TART

Donna Hay is one of my favourite cooks, as her recipes are simple and utterly delicious. This scrummy white chocolate and raspberry tart is a real treat. If you fancy trying my range, I would recommend my plain white chocolate (White Edition 01) or, for something more unusual and salty, try White Edition 02.

Serves 12

375g sweet shortcrust pastry

300g white chocolate (chopped)

475ml cream

4 egg yolks

225g raspberries

1 Preheat the oven to 200C/400F/gas mark 6. Roll out the pastry on a lightly floured surface until it is around 3mm thick.

2 Use the rolling pin to help you carefully place the pastry into a 25cm tart tin with a removable base. Trim the edges. Prick the pastry with a fork and cover it with a piece of nonstick baking paper. Fill with baking weights or rice and bake for 5 minutes.

3 Remove the weights or rice and paper, then cook for a further 6 minutes or until the pastry has turned a light golden colour.

4 Turn down the oven to 140C/275F/gas mark 1. To make the filling, place the chopped chocolate and cream in a saucepan over a low heat and stir until it is smooth.

5 Remove the mixture from the heat and whisk in the egg yolks.

6 Pour the mixture into the tart shell and bake for 25 minutes or until the tart has just set.

7 Refrigerate until cold and firm. To serve, top with the raspberries.
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