

Art of Chocolate: Belgian Masterclasses for Chocolate Professionals

by Dominique Huret

It is always refreshing to meet enthusiast entrepreneur. Laurence Koutny is definitely one of them! This Belgian lady has 20 years of experience in the chocolate industry, holding several positions for Mars and Godiva, then as consultant for several chocolatiers, among them the Icelandic Bean2Bar. It is not surprising that Youri Dumont Business Unit Director Chocolate at Belcolade group (part of the International Puratos Group) supported her project since the start in 2017. He also believed in creating Masterclasses on Chocolate to preserve the Belgian heritage. **Dominique Huret**, from Cape Decision in Brussels interviewed Laurence Koutny to find out more.

“Travelling around the world, I realized how the cunning ingeniousness and expertise of Belgian chocolate was appreciated and well known. Being Belgian myself, I found this pretty cool. On one hand, chocolate consumers are more educated, they need and want to know the origin of the ingredients and are aware of the issues in the cacao beans sourcing. Like wine and coffee, one finds more connoisseurs in chocolate nowadays. On the other hand, there is so much know how to transfer. So I decided to offer dynamic masterclasses aimed at chocolatiers, chocolate entrepreneurs, chocolate



professionals and anyone with a passion for chocolate from anywhere in the world, really! The key is a will to take their chocolate skills to a new level”, explains Laurence Koutny.

Art of Chocolate’s objective is to share, perpetuate and anchor in current and future practices all the Belgian “Savoir Faire” in chocolate. It allows those who practice the art of chocolate to develop and produce it at a very high level of quality with the desire to integrate the bean2bar philosophy, where all the ingredients and equipment create a single origin artisan chocolate.

In the heart of Brussels, very close to the prestigious Grand Place, is located the

new Chocolate Museum. In addition to the history of chocolate, that is also where lies the professional’s machines needed for the training and the making chocolate. It is also an iconic place for the Masterclasses to take place.

“Currently 13 teachers including internationally renowned luxury chocolatiers are giving the different 1 to 3 days trainings. Their expertise and ability to create while innovating at the same time are crucial. Industry professionals are also part of the team, sharing their key knowledge from creation to packaging and chocolate marketing. All this allows participants to experience a 360° immersion, with networking, exchange and conviviality.



We are in Belgium where good food is taken seriously and so is chocolate. But food pairing is becoming trendy in the chocolate sector 'adds Koutny.

Glance at the interactive masterclasses specific themes:

- Art of Making - the chocolate making process and the art to taste for starting chocolatiers
- Art of Bean to Bar –the process of Bean to bar , make your own tablet from the bean
- Art of perfecting - the advanced chocolate making, focus on innovation -sensory, creating innovative, premium products
- Art of selling: building a successful chocolate business through developing a rich customer experience
- Custom-made class for chocolate company

Youri Dumont, from Belcolade, is a fervent advocate on the need to defend the Belgian chocolate savoir-faire. He explains: "At Belcolade, we aim to be a reliable partner in innovation for our customers, helping them to become even more successful in their business. Our Taste tomorrow consumer study revealed that people increasingly want to make ethical food choices, taking into account their personal values and the interests for the planet and the people living on it. Consumers care for the people and farmers who are involved in the food industry as well as for the environment. With this in mind, we launched our Cacao-Trace program



with the aim of building a sustainable future for cocoa with a game-changing strategy. We truly believe that creating a better chocolate together is the only way to sustainability. In the Art of Chocolate sessions, the experts want to be a source of inspiration for the participants. They can pick up ideas, translate and implement them into their own business. Helping Laurence Koutny from Art of Chocolate was just in line with our philosophy".

Of course, they are other chocolate schools in Europe, but none are as specific and covering the entire Value chain. Koutny counted 27 steps in the total Value chain until the final melt of the chocolate on the consumer's palate. Retail has changed drastically: blurred line between off-line and on-line shopping habits, the chocolate sales staff has become even more important in the overall shopping experience.

The world of chocolate has changed and this is very interesting for the 100

students who followed the training last year. A solid international audience as well whether opening a chocolate shop in Ghana and in Brazil, upgrading an existing boutique in Asia or developing a new dessert offer in a restaurant ... Last summer, following express requirement, a few classes were organized in Paris.

Today chocolate is hype and virtually everybody is addicted to it. By the way, how do you fancy it? Bars or pralines, sweet milk, with nuts, black 60-75 or 90%, flavored or plain. The choice is wide and all yours. With young dynamic players in "pralines" (Dominique Persoone, Laurent Gerbaud, Cacao tree, Mina...) in Bean to Bar (Pierre Marcolini, Jean-Christophe Hubert, Benoit Nihant) in fair-trade/organic (Belvas, Zaabar as well as the traditional players (Leonidas, Neuhaus, Godiva and the likes) the offer is widening but Belgian chocolate still keeps its "lettres de noblesse". [fmbt](#)



Laurence Koutny