

Chocolate Calling



Architecture isn't just
for homes anymore

Text by Molly Davis

Top left Lina Husodo is the founder of an Austin-based fine chocolate catering company. Husodo was born in Jakarta, Indonesia, and lived there until attending Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, where she earned Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Architecture. Now living in Austin, Husodo recently received a diploma in Pastry Arts from the Culinary Academy of Austin. Photograph by LeAna Clifton

Top Right Each copper-colored leaf is filled with dark chocolate raspberry ganache for an unexpected visual/flavor combination; each dome, with coffee ganache. Husodo hand-painted the chocolates with luster dust in "rouge flambé" because she likes the iridescent copper-to-burgundy tones it creates. Photograph by Lina Husodo.

Lina Husodo, wearing the requisite white chef's jacket, pants, and kitchen-safe shoes, was giddy as she walked into the French Pastry School in downtown Chicago, where she would begin a three-day intensive course on making chocolate candies. Though the class taught by world-renowned chocolatier Chef Jean-Pierre Wybauw was open to the public, Husodo soon learned that all but a few of the sixteen students were either working pastry chefs or owners of chocolate shops. Husodo is an architect. "Interestingly, I wasn't intimidated," she recalls. "There was no time to be nervous. I was there to learn and to focus as much as possible."

What she learned—quickly—is that in the culinary world chocolate is a challenge: the first day of class, an unexpected cold front caused Chef Wybauw’s melted chocolate to cool too rapidly; the following day the building’s heating system caused it to cool too slowly. Husodo says, “Even the teacher was having problems. It was good because you see mistakes are made, how to resolve them, how to deal with them. You learn from mistakes.”

Husodo liked working with chocolate from the moment she baked her first chocolate pecan torte several years earlier at her home in Austin. Intent on creating gourmet desserts, she ambitiously created an elaborate chocolate leaf décor by peeling melted chocolate off of real dried leaves. She explains, “I like a challenge—it’s like, what can I produce?” And because working with chocolate “was so much fun,” Husodo set out to see what else she could create, which eventually led her to the class in Chicago.

After the courses, Husodo loved the idea of creating with chocolate because of the difficulty, so she determined that she would “master” the art of chocolate making. Husodo recently started a chocolate catering business specializing in handmade fine chocolates and truffles. In chefs’ lexicon, it is said we eat with our eyes first. An architect for fourteen years, Husodo’s architectural eye for composition and symmetry, combined with her culinary talent, make her chocolate candies miniature three-dimensional works of art that are as delightful to see as they are to savor.

Husodo’s design aesthetic as an architect is contemporary. This same design aesthetic can be seen in her chocolates—appearance, texture, and taste work together inside and out to create a harmonious experience. Husodo hopes each of her designs is unique. “I don’t like making things that can be mass-marketed,” she says. “If everyone is doing something, I want to be able to do something more ... I want to be different.”

For Husodo, “the creating part is the biggest joy.” Excitedly she explains that “chocolate is very liquid when you melt it, and you can do whatever you want to with it afterwards. You can mold it, you can shape it. It’s a blank canvas in liquid form.” To create her tempered chocolate candies, Husodo lines chocolate molds in numerous shapes (an isosceles pyramid, a faceted dome, a maple leaf), occasionally creating her own “shells,” like one in the shape of a teardrop. She currently uses the Belgian chocolate Barry-Callebaut—mostly in dark chocolate, because “I just think it’s satisfying.”

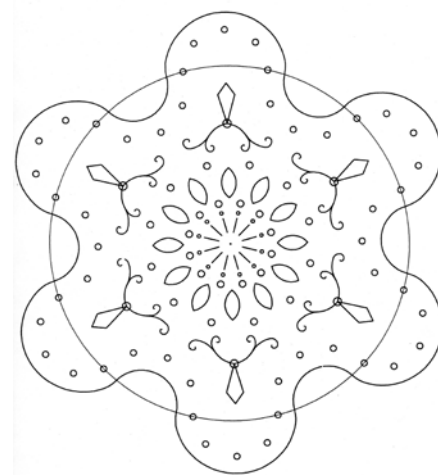
To create her fillings, Husodo enjoys experimenting with interesting ingredients. She’s perfected a fluffy dark chocolate lemon mousse, an interesting white chocolate and lavender ganache, and a melt-in-your-mouth dark chocolate coconut Kahlua ganache that contains tiny bits of sweet coconut.

With her refined sense of artistry and presentation, Husodo finishes her chocolates with tasteful detail. She might give them a color-rich pattern using “transfer sheets” (invented by Wybauw in 1965) or hand-paint them, sometimes with colored chocolate or sometimes with what’s known to cake decorators and chocolatiers

The Xs in “Valentine’s Day Sweets” are filled with dark chocolate candied-orange, almond, and Cointreau while the Os are white chocolate and lavender. Photograph by Lina Husodo



Below Though focused on chocolates, Husodo still enjoys designing and decorating the occasional cake, like this one, which she created for entry into Austin’s Third Annual Capital Confectioners Cake and Sugar Art Show. The cake, showing Husodo’s meticulous attention to detail, won second place in the competition’s Special Occasion/Novelty One Tier, Adult Beginner category. Husodo designed the pattern for the cake topping, made of fondant, with Computer Aided Design, software that’s indispensable to her as an architect. Photograph by Lina Husodo



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Top Husodo and her husband remodeled their former Austin residence, where the kitchen took shape with an unusual curving wall, clean lines, and strong color. Photograph by Paul Bardagiy

Left Hand-painted detail is what makes Husodo's chocolates so couture. Each piece looks and tastes rich. Photograph by LeAna Clifton

as “luster dust,” a food-safe dust that lends subtle color and metallic sheen. “What I like to do is make them have personal touches by adding this little copper dust. By doing different decorations by hand, you make it personal.”

With architecture, the process from design to finished product sometimes takes years. But with chocolate, Husodo enjoys the instant gratification of seeing what she can create and the immediate joy her chocolates inspire in others. “When you make chocolates—you just mention it—strangers, their eyes get big and suddenly some just want to be your friend. Chocolate draws people together.”

Not surprisingly, Husodo wants to create chocolate sculpture. But with chocolate, “there’s no such thing as a load-bearing wall or a steel column so you have to understand the material.” Though she already creates candies unsurpassed in appearance and taste, she says she’s “still practicing.” In February of 2007, Husodo’s chocolate candies—displayed in a box she designed with the help of her architect-husband James Linville—won first place at Austin’s Third Annual Capital Confectioners Cake and Sugar Art Show, her first competition.

Not long after the first class in 2005, Husodo took a second chocolate candy course at Chicago’s French Pastry School taught by one of the school’s founders, Chef Sebastien Canonne. In 2006, she enrolled in a six-month Pastry Arts Program at the Culinary Academy of Austin to learn the basics of pastry and dessert-making before settling on chocolate as her exclusive professional focus.

Though Husodo still gets excited about architectural projects in which the client’s aesthetic vision and hers coincide, her passion is chocolate. Looking away as if to listen she says, “Every time I am away from the chocolate, the chocolate keeps calling me.”

Happily for everyone who loves chocolate, she won’t be away from it any longer. Husodo is focused on creating couture chocolates with her new company. In the future, she hopes to feature chocolate sculptures and other exclusive chocolate desserts. Husodo dreams of one day owning a chocolate shop that she and her husband design where everything—the space, the displays, the packaging, the chocolates—work together harmoniously. What a dreamy, chocolaty heaven-on-earth that will be. TH&L