

CANDY INDUSTRY

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CANDY WRAPPER

Sweet Profile

Lecia Duke, Quintessential Chocolates Co. & Chocolat, Fredericksburg, Texas.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of Quintessential Chocolates Co., a milestone that the company marked with the introduction of two new liqueur pralines, Irish Cream and Amaretto Liqueur, during the Philly Candy Show in January.

During the media event, Lecia Duke, founder and CEO of Quintessential Chocolates, described the new chocolates as “the culmination of long hours of planning and hard work to produce another original spirit-filled chocolate that is relevant to the ever-changing taste preferences of consumers.”

But then, Duke probably wouldn't want it any other way. The Native American architect-turned-chocolater — she established

her business as a custom chocolate manufacturer in 1984 — found her niche when she responded to a client seeking an all-American product that would be similar to the finest European liquid center chocolates.

By apprenticing under a Swiss Master Chocolatier, Duke learned the 200-year-old Liqueur Praline technique, a five-day process involving starch moulding and sugar curing. Today, she offers a broad array of alcoholic and non-alcoholic filled chocolates, all distinctively American in flavor.

As the only American producer of this European confectionery process for nearly 20 years, Duke was gradually able to expand her business regionally and then nationally. In 2002, she opened a retail store, Chocolat, taking advantage of the tourists coming through Fredericksburg and increased interest in fine chocolates.

This month, the company teamed up with the Virginia Wine Board to showcase that state's fine wines in barrel-shaped chocolates containing wine from six different vineyards and wineries that represent six Virginia wine regions.

Most importantly, Lecia remains enthralled by the opportunity to preserve a European tradition in a most American way.



Lecia Duke's filled chocolates, which are available with and without alcohol, are made using a 200-year-old European process.

What did you think you would be when you grew up?

An architect. My mother was a professional artist and my father, an engineer ... it seemed natural.

Name some of your favorite movies.

"Chocolat," "French Kiss," "What the Bleep Do We Know?" and "Phantom of the Opera."

Describe your dream vacation.

Going "Down Under" and visiting the opal houses of the Outback in Australia, then off to New Zealand for a serious walkabout in the mountains!

What book are you currently reading?

"The Great Shift (Co-creating the New World in 2012 and Beyond)," "Toltec Prophecies" and "Bex Deus."

Aside from a family member, whom would you most want to be stranded with on a deserted island?

Without a doubt my lover, Nick Bradford!

What's your pet peeve?

People who say they are bored and have nothing to do! There is more to discover in this world than is possible in 10 lifetimes!

I'd give anything to meet:

I've already met Yul Brenner. (I would say my life is complete in that respect.)

The best piece of advice that I've gotten:

Be true to yourself and therefore truthful in all that you do (from Granny).

What excites you most about your job?

Every day is a fresh opportunity. What delights me the most is seeing the faces light up when they taste our product or when they think of just the right person to send it to! @