



MAKE ROOM FOR

Texas Chocolate

YOU'D THINK A STATE THAT HAS EARNED WORLDWIDE ACCLAIM for barbecue and Tex-Mex would give it a rest when it comes to racking up culinary honors. But then, along comes a surprisingly large and diverse group of Texans who make their living by producing and selling, of all things, fine chocolate. And in true Texas fashion, some of them have raised the bar, so to speak, to new heights. ■ The owner of a Fredericksburg chocolate shop—for example, was the first chocolatier in the United States to use the centuries-old confectionery art form known as *liqueur praliné*. In 2006, an Austin entrepreneur's whole-bean chocolates made the *Savueur* 100, the magazine's annual list of "favorite restaurants, food, drink, people, places, and things." And the year before, the editors of *Taste*, a popular gourmet-food show on British television, named a Plano couple's delectable dark chocolate as the "#1 luxury chocolate in the world." ■ The question for anyone in search of great Texas chocolate is not "Where do you find it?" but "Where do you start?"

BY NOLA McKEY

LECIA DUKE, the owner of *Chocolat* in downtown Fredericksburg, has gotten used to visitors comparing her shop with the one in the popular 2000 film of the same name. For the record, Lecia hadn't even seen the film when she opened her retail space four years ago, but even she admits that comparisons can be made.

Most importantly, like the character played by Juliette Binoche, Lecia likes to bring happiness to others. "I love what I do," she says, "and I love seeing the smiles on my customers' faces. Chocolate makes that happen."

Lecia's specialty is—European-style liquid-center chocolates—has—been bringing smiles to people's faces for more than two decades. A former architect and graphic designer, she founded Quintessential Chocolates in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1984, after apprenticing under a Swiss master-chocolatier to learn the almost-lost confectionery art form known as *liqueur praliné* (sugar crust). Now, at *Chocolat*, you can find chocolates with a range of liquid centers, including premium spirits wine, and non-alcoholic flavors like Southern pecan coffee and black cherry nectar.

For an incredible chocolate experience, ask for Lecia's signature *liqueur praliné* chocolate, made with *Crema de Almendrado Tequila*. Pop the whole



Lecia Duke, proprietor of *Chocolat* in downtown Fredericksburg, pipes a detail on white chocolate caramel centers (they're encased in dark chocolate). Lecia's signature *liqueur praliné* chocolates are popular among locals, many of whom hail from Germany and other European countries.

thing into your mouth, and wait a few seconds for the progression of flavors first the almond, then tequila, and finally dark chocolate. Definitely sigh-worthy.

Customers can watch Lecia and some of her eight employees complete part of the production process—the enrobing—when they stop by to make a purchase. The shop also offers truffles, chocolate nut clusters, barks, solid bars, dipped fruit, and its trademarked "silk fudge" and "Colette."

Chocolat is located at
330 West Main St.
In Fredericksburg TX
Call 830-9909382
Or 800-842-3382
Or visit
www.chocolat-tx.us

Like the character IN THE MOVIE *CHOCOLAT*,
LECIA DUKE, OF FREDERICKSBURG'S CHOCOLAT, LIKES TO BRING HAPPINESS TO OTHERS. "CHOCOLATE MAKES THAT HAPPEN," SHE SAYS.



Open truffles.

"Chocolate is fun for everyone, and it should be available for everyone," says Lecia. "That's why we have chocolate-covered cherries for 50 cents, as well as cherry-brandy truffles for \$1.60."

After working on this story for more than a year, associate editor NOLA McKEY says she is hooked on fine chocolate for life.

Our portion of 8 page article on Texas Artisan Chocolatiers in Texas Highways Magazine February 2007