

# Life & times

## That all too familiar and passionate exemplar of eating chocolate

### SLOW LIVING



For those readers who are avid chocoholics, the passionate ritual involved in chocolate consumption will be all too familiar. Television advertisements cultivate this image, as attractive women tantalise the voyeur with a slow, sensual feast on a sweet, velvety cube.

However, it was not until recently that I became aware of the full extent to which chocolate can be an exemplar of “slow living”.

Friends of mine are starting a chocolate factory. Willy Wonker jokes aside, this ex-winemaker and his wife, have embarked on the journey to master the full process of chocolate production. From bean to

bar. Well before the private “moments” of chocolate consumption begin, the slow process of chocolate creation is growing on cacao farms in the hot and humid hills of Indonesia, Madagascar, Jamaica or Venezuela, to name a few.

As the fruit ripens in the shade, readying for harvest, each region and farm develops unique flavours – subtle citrus bursts, floral undertones or earthy qualities. Before they leave the farm, bound for factories around the world, the beans are removed from their pods, carefully fermented and slowly sundried.

The laborious, yet delicate process of turning these sacks of foreign-looking beans into our familiar delicacy begins on the factory floor. Walking in to my friend’s new factory, monstrous alien pod-est machines loom over shuddering sifters and super-sized mixers. In one

corner, the chocolate begins to take shape with a slow, long, low temperature roast. The shuddering sifter, the winnower, then separates the roasted bean into nibs (bean pieces) and husks. The giant alien-pod hides an impressive mortar and pestle contraption which then grinds the bean pieces at a gentle pace into a more recognisable paste. After sugar is added, the conching begins – a slow stir that lasts for several days.

Just like any good wine, the wine-cum-chocolate maker informs, the chocolate must be left to age before being heated again, poured into moulds, cooled and then gently bedded down in pretty paper and foil.

The love and care that goes into every individual stage quickly overshadows that moment of oral satisfaction that now seems so quick and under-appreciative.



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I vow, as I sample their wares, to value each bite, taste and swallow. I urge my under-educated taste buds to locate the difference between each single-origin bar, value the smooth texture provided by the giant stone grinder, and localise each element that exhibits the perfectly timed roasting, conching and ageing.

The chocolate makers assure me that, with time and practice, my slow tasting will become refined and my mouth will be as beholden to the journey this morsel has been on, from the farms of far-off places to the factory on a farm in Margaret River, as my mind now is.

\* Thankyou to Bahen & Co for the education . . . and the samples.

**Kathryn Locke** is a member of the Centre for Everyday Life at Murdoch University.