

# BAHEN & CO.

ARTICLE

Styled by Stacey Clark  
Words by Em Hazeldean  
Images by Lauren Hall

PERTH



Josh and Jacq Bahen are as organic and honest as the chocolate they create. Bahen & Co. chocolate is produced in Australia's South West, about 280 kilometers south of Perth, an idyllic location nestled between forest and sea.

After fifteen years of winemaking, Josh is at ease sipping coffee against a vineyard backdrop, and his wife is sweetly nonchalant as they chat about a recent trip to Italy to source machines for their grass-roots factory. The thirty-something couple embodies the Western Australian, laid back lifestyle, and their lives read like a fairytale, but it wasn't without hard work.

A taste of French chocolate was the catalyst for Josh Bahen. As a child, Easter eggs would sit untouched and unwanted, but there was something different about this chocolate. He tasted the notes and the fruitiness, the actual cocoa bean, and it was like nothing he'd ever tried before.

"I bit into this piece of chocolate and I wondered why we can't find a product like this in the southern hemisphere, Australia." And then the work began. "I discovered that the cocoa beans are actually fermented. The pod is cut in half, and the beans scooped out, and they're covered with this fruit pulp. It tastes really nice, really sweet."

The beans are put in giant tubs with the pulp still around the outside of them, and left to ferment for six days. This process equates to 80 percent of the quality of what is in the chocolate bar. "It's exactly the same as making a bottle of wine, or a beer or cheese." He knew that if he could focus on the fermentation process, they could











produce a chocolate that no one else in the world can.

Determined to learn the ancient art of chocolate making, their first bag of cocoa beans was purchased from Indonesia, and they began roasting in their home oven. Entering samples in blind tastings against chocolates of a high caliber from all around the world and scoring better in some cases, they realized their produce was a direct result of the quality of the bean. Josh and Jacq entertained the thought that this was possibly something they could be successful at.

Still working day-jobs, but dreaming of chocolate, the pair is honest about the doubt they felt before jumping in headfirst. "The winemaking was pretty intensive but every other spare second of the day we were planning to travel to visit cocoa farms, or traveling to try to secure vintage or antique equipment."

"There was so much doubt in our minds. We wondered if people were even going to like what we would produce!" Josh distinctly remembers sitting in a hotel in America, about to purchase their first lot of machinery and Jacq saying, "Lets do it. This is it." They joke about their naivety at the outset, but it's this naivety that allowed them to take their time, and make mistakes on a small scale. And Josh admits to making mistakes, "No one's ever taught me to make chocolate before."

"We visited a few French producers in the beginning. Their machines were over 100 years old, some of them. I didn't know what they were." Their machinery, bought from old chocolate factories and gathered from around the world, ensures the authenticity of what they create.

Josh is passionate about creating to a standard that pre-dates the industrialization of chocolate. Of simplifying not only the process, but the ingredients. "We want to make chocolate the way they did 100 years ago. There was a time where you'd go down to your local butcher to buy your meat, and your chocolate producer was on the same strip. You'd put in your order for your family, and come back a week later and your chocolate bars would be ready."

It's his passion for quality, and authenticity that lead him to direct relationships with the farmers he purchases beans from, and to operate free from the trade price of cocoa. "We want to help them improve the quality of their beans. They'll get paid three or four times the amount they were getting paid before, for the same amount of work."

Josh's obsession with cocoa is infectious and the Bahen's search for non-hybridized species of cocoa has taken them to some of the most remote and exotic places on the planet. The beans are then brought back to Margaret River and run through old world machines under Josh's watchful eye.

The process is slow and methodical. The beans are hand roasted, winnowed, tasted, and tempered. Using only the cocoa and organic cane sugar, the honest goodness of each bar created speaks of its origins, and is surprisingly sweet and fruity for their 70 percent cocoa content. Each bar is hand wrapped in gold foil and botanical and

geometric prints, ensuring a feast for the eyes and the soul before the eating even begins.

He refers to quitting his day-job as a winemaker three years ago as 'jumping off the cliff of stability'. "Even today we wonder if it's going to work. Only in the last couple of months have we actually said, this is our job now."

Three years on, and they are finally finding themselves emerging from their chocolate-induced coma, and you might find them out for a surf, or sipping a glass of red as they cook dinner. The Bahens laugh with happy exhaustion on their faces as they sip their coffee. "We go to work now and we almost get paid."











