



In a synthesis of several slow foodie ideas, Lodjic works for a sort of vertical integration in her thoughtful, small-scale operation. While her husband, Kelly McIver, works by day for the 4J school district, Lodjic spends her time at their farm in Cottage Grove stirring and pouring and infusing — and taking care of the two cows they just bought (cows which might, if she goes through with the small producer paperwork, become the providers of organic butter and cream). She also tends the herbs, berry bushes and other

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the rules of Lodjic

Witch's sweet treats come from love of history, organics and local food

BY SUZI STEFFEN

Deep, rich ganache infused with Pyrat Rum. Fair-trade, locally roasted organic espresso beans wafting through chocolate. Makes your mouth whimper just thinking about them, no? The woman responsible for these evilly fine creations is Michelle Lodjic, known to Tuesday and Holiday Market frequent flyers as the Kitchen Witch.



crops that provide fresh tastes in truffles like the ancho cherry or the mint, which is infused with fresh organic mint leaves. If she could grow her own cocoa beans, she would; she's trying to source chocolate through a neighbor who owns a share in the Grenada Chocolate Company, a small, sustainable organic chocolate co-op.

She doesn't want her operation to get too big. "I want it to be the sort of slow food concept where you nurture the product from start to finish, supporting local economy and local farmers," she says. Lodjic grew up in various parts of Oregon and graduated from Sheldon. After she finished her degree at Mount Holyoke College, she returned home and soon began working with the original owner of Fenton & Lee Chocolatiers. "That was the first time I worked with chocolate, and I found out it was a creative medium," she explains. She enjoyed creating sculptures and discovering new ways to show off the beauty of the material, which, she says, can be pretty touchy to work with.

As with any culinary chemistry experiment, small variations in temperature can change the final product. "I hand-temper the chocolate," she says, and adds, for those uninitiated in ganache creation, that "tempering is where you align the crystals and the chocolates, and that's what makes it really glossy and crisp." Dark chocolate is especially hard to temper because "the higher the cocoa content, the more crystals you have," she says, and of course, rich dark chocolate is key to any truffle. "Chocolate melts at your body temperature if it's tempered correctly," she explains, but if chocolate is tempered wrong or left sitting in a warm place, even dark chocolate can get chocolate bloom — that greyish tinge that makes the chocolate taste off.

Lodjic's treats just won't last long enough for that to happen. Her Meyer lemon truffle is an intensely explosive piece of paradise, a reduction of sunlight sweetly wrapped in wonderfully bitter dark chocolate. It's a delight best appreciated in tiny bites, and, like all of Lodjic's fruit truffles (seasonally available, she notes, and made with organic fruits, juices and herbs), it qualifies as vegan. "Chocolate and fruit together without the cream," she says, mean "a crisper, sharper taste."

Lodjic is more than a maker of decadent treats; she's also a food historian, and that's apparent with her line of cocktail truffles. "A lot of liqueurs have been passed down from old abbeys and monasteries and small villages that specialized in a certain combination of herbs and nuts with special local flavors," she explains, which is one of the reasons she tries to stick close to home for her sourcing. Lodjic grows enough of her own product to create liqueurs for some of her truffles, and she gets her brandy, for instance, from Portland's Clear Creek Distillery.

You can't find her treats online, and she won't ship them because they're fresh and tender. So catch the Kitchen Witch soon at the Good Earth Home, Garden & Living Show Jan. 26-28 at the Lane County Fairgrounds or at the Oregon Truffle Festival, where she'll have a special Oregon black truffle truffle (see "Yummy, Yummy Fungi," p. 8). Failing that, give her a call at 942-1881 and beg for some hand-packaged treats, from chocolate bark to turtles to fatal fudge brownies. Hey, they can't be bad for you! They're organic! Local! And crazy good. ■