

EUPHORIA CHOCOLATE
COMPANY STARTED IN
1980

CRAFT CHOCOLATE

EUPHORIA IS CHOCOLATE WITHOUT THE OOMPA LOOMPAS BY RICK LEVIN



RAW COCOA BEANS
SERVE AS FODDER FOR
EUPHORIA'S CHOCOLATE
TRUFFLES

I'm here to report that the Euphoria Chocolate Company in west Eugene bears little resemblance to the delicious Byzantine splendor of Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory. Sadly, no orangey Oompa Loompas mobbed me at the entrance when I visited, and Euphoria proprietor Van Glass is practically the antithesis of that passive-aggressive tyrant Willy Wonka, whose benevolent disregard sent poor Augustus Gloop up the tube.

The insides of Euphoria, instead, are clean and elegant, almost Kubrickian in their steely geometry, and Van Glass — who co-owns the operation with his wife Bonnie Glass — is a kind, mild-mannered man whose professional approach to high-quality artisanal chocolate is less Gene Wilder than Henry Ford.

"Craft chocolate is just starting to gain serious momentum and is still in the early phases of growth," he tells me. "I would liken it to where the craft beer industry was about 20 years ago."

Bonnie Glass also emphasizes the unique characteristics of the sort of "small batch" craft chocolate in which Euphoria specializes. "A good-quality, consistent chocolate is satisfying," she explains. "Like wine, it has differences tied to region, production and a lot of other factors."

Together, the Glasses are the last people you might expect to be making and selling such addictive devilry as those chocolate-coated graham crackers I can't for the life of me stop wolfing down.

Nonetheless, Van and Bonnie Glass did exhibit a devious and somewhat Wonka-like delight as they watched me sample a generous offering of their latest innovations: soda truffles (grape, root beer, 7-Up, cola) and chocolate-coated cereal, which includes such classics consumer staples as Cap'n Crunch and the surprisingly delicious Golden Grahams.

Talk about knowing your audience. As I popped one delicacy after the other into my mouth ("don't mind if I do..."), a kind of Gloopian greed overtook me; I wasn't sure if I'd finish the chocolate or the chocolate would finish me.

It's hard to believe that, less than three years back, the Glasses were living in Costa Rica with no thought of making chocolate. Van, a Eugene native, has a background in software engineering, and Texas-born Bonnie's only experience with food production was working in a tortilla factory. When they moved to Eugene in December 2013, all they knew was they wanted a new venture.

"I soon learned that the owners of Euphoria Chocolate Co. were retiring and thought this would be a perfect opportunity for us both," Van says, noting that Euphoria "has been part of the community for the past 35 years, so it is important to us that we be good stewards continuing to offer customer favorites while also introducing new product lines that allow us to put our own stamp on the company."

"I think people like buying something new to try," Bonnie adds. "It gives them a reason to keep coming in."

Perhaps the biggest flag the Glasses have planted in the established company comes on the production side of things. Among all the munchies I sampled was evidence of the Glasses' most daring venture — a truffle that the company has created from beginning to end, unlike most manufacturers who buy their chocolate base in bulk.

What this means is that Euphoria is now in the business of buying raw cocoa beans from places like Ghana, Guatemala and Papua New Guinea; they roast the beans themselves (similar to the way coffee is roasted, but at a lower temp), separate the meaty nib from the husk ("winnowing"), grind the nibs into a chocolate "liqueur" (the "mélange" process) and, from there, turn them into truffles.

Euphoria's bean-to-bar truffles are disarmingly complex. Unlike most mass-produced chocolate, which strikes a single sweet note, the truffles reveal themselves slowly, with a flavor profile that unfolds hints of coffee, fruit and a becoming bitter-sweetness that is satisfying in a uniquely adult way. Euphoria's truffles are to the waxy monotone of Hershey's chocolate what Budweiser is to, say, Ninkasi or Hop Valley. It's like the world goes from flat to round.

The Glasses seem pleased at my response, and both say they are excited for local customers to try their new wares. "One of my favorite parts of my job is doing chocolate tastings," Van Glass later tells me. "I enjoy nothing more than to get together with a group of people who have never tasted craft chocolate before, walk them through a series of different single-origin chocolates and discuss impressions."

The least I could do was oblige. ■

Euphoria Chocolate Company's main plant is at 4090 Stewart Road, with products sold at several outlets and stores around town, including the new downtown Euphoria at 946 Willamette Street; for further information, visit euphoriachocolate.com.

'A GOOD-QUALITY, CONSISTENT CHOCOLATE IS SATISFYING. LIKE WINE, IT HAS DIFFERENCES TIED TO REGION, PRODUCTION AND A LOT OF OTHER FACTORS.'

— BONNIE GLASS, EUPHORIA CHOCOLATE