

## Why the World Needs Chocolate

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Each year at this time, Americans purchase as many as 58 million pounds of chocolate for Valentine's Day. A heart-shaped candy is standard, but these days, biting into one doesn't guarantee you the old-style vanilla cream. Boutique and artisanal chocolatiers are changing the culture of confection as we know it—and making the world better one bonbon at a time.

In 2008, according to chocolate critic Clay Gordon, the premium chocolate market was a \$1.6

billion business. About \$720 million of that came from small regional and local chocolatiers, many of whom make their candy by hand. More ordinary Americans are seeking out—even making—specialty sweets.

"In hard times, people look for different levels of luxury," explains Norman Love, founder of Norman Love Confections in Fort Myers, Fla., and former head pastry chef for the Ritz-Carlton Hotel chain. "When you open a box of premium chocolates, you feel rich."