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**YUMMY TREATS  
IN A FLASH**

**HOLIDAY GUIDE  
HELPS YOU SHOP**

**LOVE STRUCK**

**MEET THE CHOCOLATIER  
TURNING THE INDUSTRY  
UPSIDE DOWN**



**Norman Loy  
JURY PRESIDENT**

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# Love STRUCK

*Pastry chef created eye candy,  
turned chocolate industry upside down*



BY CRAIG GARRETT

One of the world's great chocolatiers started his business on a whim. A former hotel executive and pastry chef producing shows for television's Food Network, Norman Love in a rented office in Fort Myers was doodling with cocoa butter, shaved chocolate and candy-making molds. It was sheer boredom. That was 2001. Love's early chocolates had the signature vibrant gestures in color and flavor, a cocoa-buttery taste and faux finish, he says. He shared the chocolates with friends.

It was the moment uninteresting chocolate became eye candy. Think the old Mother's Day samplers in guess-which-flavor wrapping vs. Norman Love morsels that almost jump from the green packaging. The Fort Myers-based company should sell close to 1.5 million pieces of candy this year, has introduced "Chocolate Journeys"

PHOTOS ON THIS AND OPPOSITE PAGE COURTESY OF NORMAN LOVE CONFECTIONS



Norman Love



THE LOVE FAMILY'S GERMAN/POLISH ANCESTRY WAS EXPRESSED IN CAKES, PIES AND DESSERTS, OR WHAT HE TERMS TODAY AS "EDIBLE ART."

on 18 Princess Cruises' ships, its pastry chefs are among the world's best, and there are new flavors and looks in the candy/pastry pipeline every day. Norman Love Confections also offers a gelato line in retail shops. The gelato is offered at Bennett's Fresh Roast on Sanibel, which immediately helped boost sales, owner Bob Bennett says. "With the help of Norman Love [gelato]," Bennett says, "our numbers are creeping up and up ... and up."

And the confectionary media and other chefs snap to attention when Love's staff members roll in for a convention. "It hits me when we go outside our bubble," says Maura Metheny, in charge of chocolate design and products with Norman Love Confections. She started with Norman Love in 2001 and has been named a top pastry chef by Dessert Professional Magazine. "There are lots of questions [about Norman Love Confections]. It's still shocking."

Norman Love in person is maybe 6 feet tall and is trim. In his 50s, he plays occasional drop-in hockey. Sitting for an interview, Love exudes anxiousness. But that wall lowers with questions about those he has selected to run his wholesale/retail empire, about his wife and kids, his mother and grandmother, hockey jerseys hanging in the office. As CEO of a huge food enterprise, it's not surprising to discover that kitchen work and ambition are ingrained in Love's character. He works from a retail strip

center he built along Daniels Parkway near Southwest Florida International Airport. Pilots were among his first customers. In the center are immaculate research and assembly kitchens, offices, a gelato café and a confections/pastries store that looks like a big box of candy. The smell is amazing. Truckloads of products are shipped daily. His retail stores explode in business at the holidays, hum with sales in off-season. Counter workers are bubbly, knowledgeable—and patient. Norman and Mary Love and their two children run the company.

Norman Love is Ritz-Carlton's former top pastry executive. He worked 40 weeks of the year in Europe, Asia and Mexico. "Nonstop crazy," he says in describing 18-hour days, not always knowing where he was. But forever running. As a Ritz-Carlton executive he was, of course, paid handsomely. And yet returning home was more like visiting. "I never really knew my children," Love says, gazing off when questioned about how weeks and months away test a marriage. "And that got old." Producing reality television, ultimately starting Norman Love Confections, were about gaining control, he says, noting that his pace today is as busy, only now it includes Mary Love and their son and daughter.

For this profile Love is seated in his Fort Myers office. There are rolled blueprints in the corner, a pair of kitchen clogs to



Norman Love with staff.

the side, a book titled "10 Best of Everything" on a shelf. There's a desk photograph of Mary Love. In telling his story, Love repeatedly acknowledges his wife's sacrifices so that he could pursue his corporate ambitions. Norman Love has been examined and interviewed into a delirium. He jumps at the opportunity to show his firm's research labs, the offices and to introduce key members of his crew, rather than rehash Norman Love anecdotes. Reviewing piles of press clippings and magazine profiles over the last decade, his reluctance to talk too much about himself is reasonable. He's been asked the same questions a thousand times, especially about the revenue his firm generates. Those are answered with a smile.

Still, the sweet seduction of Norman Love is important. It grabbed hold early, he says, in suburban Philadelphia. The Love family's German/Polish ancestry was expressed in cakes, pies and desserts, or what he terms today as "edible art." As a teen he ran confection shops on the East Coast of Florida, at 18 enrolled at the Culinary Institute of America, absorbing "exactly what I wanted to learn," he says of discovering the wonders of pastries. Migrating to Miami Beach, Love tutored under an Italian pastry whiz, working nights in a restaurant kitchen. He further refined his skills in a French pastry shop from 1983 to 1984, then joined the Ritz. He was also a member of a United

States culinary medalist team, and has judged world pastry competitions. Norman Love credits his mother, Lynnore, and a grandmother, Claire, for the inspiration. "How I wish they could be here today to enjoy the wonderful treats we produce," he wrote in his memoir "Artistry in Chocolate: A Story of Love."

Chocolate is the original food of the gods. Produced from the seed of the tropical *Theobroma cacao* tree, cocoa has been cultivated for thousands of years. The Aztecs made it into a beverage known as xocoltl, or "bitter water," according to historians. The chocolate-making process remained unchanged for centuries. Mills in the 19th century squeezed out cocoa butter, which created durable chocolate. Two-thirds of the world's cocoa today is produced in West Africa, and about one-third of chocolate sales are generated in Western Europe. The average United Kingdom citizen, for instance, consumes about 25 pounds of chocolate. Americans consume about one-quarter of that figure. Milk chocolate is favored in the United States. World chocolate-lovers annually inhale some 7.5-million tons of chocolate.

Americans from the beginning made chocolate drinks and munchies. Physician James Baker and Irish immigrant John Hannon opened New England's first chocolate factory in 1765 at a water-powered mill in Massachusetts, according to accounts. The Baker Chocolate Co. sold hard cakes of chocolate that

PHOTOGRAPH: TONY AND JESSICA/PHOTO COURTESY OF NORMAN LOVE CONFECTIONS



DESPITE THE COMPANY'S RAPID GROWTH AND ITS EMBRACE BY SENSATIONS SUCH AS OPRAH AND NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, THERE'S STILL A SENSE NORMAN LOVE CONFECTIONS IS A FAMILY OPERATION.

the colonists ground and mixed with boiling water to make hot chocolate. "Baker's Cocoa," an 18th-century advertisement read, "is particularly adapted for elderly people, as it contains considerable fatty matter, more than one quarter, yet it is easily digested and is pure delicious." English tax levies on tea prompted the idea that drinking chocolate was an American's patriotic duty.

In a small waiting area of muted colors and shag rugs at the firm's headquarters, staff members offer water and engage in small talk to soften the wait to see their boss. The gestures don't feel contrived, and it's pleasant inside. Despite the company's rapid growth and its embrace by sensations such as Oprah and National Geographic, there's still a sense Norman Love Confections is a family operation. Back in Norman Love's office, there are framed and signed hockey jerseys from the Pittsburgh star Sidney Crosby. Love references Crosby to describe his own doctrine, to share his philosophy of achievement. This man who has created a Willy Wonka-like empire, an imaging genius, really, chooses to gush about Crosby, a kid born to place a puck in a net.

There is a glow in Norman Love. "Crosby," he says in precise diction, glancing at a desktop screensaver of the Pittsburgh locker room, "is committed to getting results. It's so easy to focus on excuses, but [Crosby] has always had the burning desire and work ethic to get better. I've always admired that about him." ❧

Craig Garrett is Editor-in-Chief for TOTI Media.



Norman Love in his confections/pastries store located near Southwest Florida International Airport.



Norman Love places candy on a baking sheet while working alongside staff in his busy kitchen.

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