

Producer OF THE Month

FEBRUARY 2022



TAVERNIER
chocolates



Brattleboro, VT



All photos by Clare Barboza. From left: Bronwyn, Grace, John, and Dar.



BRATTLEBORO FOOD CO-OP

Producer ^{OF} ^{THE} *Month*

by Jon Megas-Russell



TAVERNIER
chocolates



Dar Tavernier-Singer and John Singer, founders, owners, and operators of Tavernier Chocolates, have called Brattleboro home since they moved here from the Bay Area of California in 1999. In 2014 they started Tavernier Chocolates, and in 2016 they were featured as Producer of the Month here at the Brattleboro Food Co-op. As we explore the chocolates available for Valentine's Day season, it felt appropriate to circle back and catch up with Dar and John on how they have fine-tuned their approach and their sourcing practices, and where things are headed in the coming years.

As Tavernier Chocolates has evolved, a deeper focus has been placed on ingredients obtained locally, from farms and also through

foraging. This enables them to prepare chocolates with a unique twist. Flavor breakthroughs tend to happen during the summer and harvest seasons when they have a bit more time on their hands to explore ingredients. Over time, their kitchen has turned into a sort of lab for testing, experimenting, creating, and drying ingredients for use in the winter months. From choice wild edible mushrooms to local fruits, from farm-fermented black garlic to Vermont-made cheese and maple syrup, local ingredients help to create a tasting experience unique to Tavernier. Of course, their ingredients list extends well beyond what has been mentioned and their approach is inspired by chefs who use extensive ingredients to create amazing flavors. Dar's experience

in restaurants and cafes across the U.S. and Europe combined with John's experience in coffee roasting allows them to tell stories through their chocolate. In addition, the other members of their team have a passion for creating foods and botanical offerings, such as ferments and tinctures, which brings even more knowledge to their chocolate creations. Hand making chocolates with a flavor focus on ingredients not always named sugar has been essential to Tavernier's development and follows more traditional European techniques. These chocolates are created slowly, in small batches, with hand-blended ingredients and very intentional placement that delivers chocolates with flavor and beauty. Their offerings can be described as elegant, earthy, seasonal, and ethical.



One fine example of their approach to chocolate creation is the award-winning charcuterie, which was recently bestowed a Yankee Magazine Food Award. What makes these chocolates different is that they are quite savory and feature non-traditional chocolate ingredients, such as cultured butter, honey, chèvre, blue cheese, and other palate-pleasing combinations. With names such as Salami, Mortadella, and Pâté, they are what John calls “mind openers,” with extraordinary blends of flavor handcrafted to accompany any grazing board or appetizer platter. These taste particularly delightful paired with cheese, meat, fruit, or sauces, and can be spread on bread or add an excellent complement to beer or wine. Dar and John are proud of these recipes

and now have a following across the entire country. While shopping the Co-op, don’t forget about their chocolate bars, bon bons, holiday boxes, and limited edition seasonal offerings—all found on the end cap that says “Sweet on Vermont.”

Sourcing of their chocolate is of the utmost importance to them and they focus predominantly on direct-trade chocolate. This is an ethical approach to sourcing, as the chocolates are grown, harvested, and processed by the farmers and their partners in the country of origin. Some of these farmers have started cooperatives so that they can pool resources, grow higher quality cacao, and obtain higher prices for their crop. A few years back, Dar took a trip to Ecuador in order to

meet the farmers, learn about the growth of cacao, and experience the cacao being processed. This trip allowed Tavernier to deepen their direct relationship with farmers and know first hand that they are supporting these folks with fair and friendly wages without the use of child labor. Direct trade allows them to more effectively acquire single country-of-origin chocolate. Their sourcing of chocolates is similar to what you might experience with both wine and coffee.

Collaborations closer to home are one of Dar and John’s favorite ways to provide folks with a tasty chocolate experience. You can find the cacao they source in Stone Corral’s Chocolate Maple Porter (not always available at the Co-op but may be



on tap at Stone Corral's Richmond, VT, taproom). They are in conversations with other brewers and in the past have worked with Brattleboro's own Hermit Thrush to integrate cacao and or chocolate into their beverages. Over the past few years, Tavernier has created very successful cheese and chocolate pairing boxes that were sold online with Consider Bardwell and Vermont Shepherd farms. One of their most memorable tastings was a few years back, when they offered a simple chocolate and beer pairing at the VT Brewfest with a brewery from Montreal. As the world opens up and events become safer to attend, they plan on seeking new ways to collaborate with wineries, breweries, co-ops, producers, farmers, and restaurants to hold in-person tasting events.

During the COVID lock down of 2020, Dar and John continued their business, and although their staff shrunk and in-person tasting ended, excitingly their online sales soared. Another silver lining was that, locally, they were proud to watch the Brattleboro Food Co-op become their "chocolate shop" as sales here grew exponentially. That trend continues today, and since the values of Tavernier align with the Co-op's, they feel

honored by their popularity with Co-op customers. It's interesting to note that they hear from many people who purchase online from Boston and New York that they first tried Tavernier when shopping at the Brattleboro Food Co-op. The relationship between the Co-op and Tavernier is an amazing example of a shared bond and local economic success story.

One of the other blessings of 2020 was the amount of time Dar and John had to experiment. They were able to dabble with lots of flavors and different forms of chocolate and candy. With many unknowns about climate change and inflation on the price of high quality ingredients, it will be important for them to be able to pivot in new and exciting directions. A few examples from their time over the past year and half stand out. First was the creation of their new sipping chocolate flavors: a combination of Ecuadorian dark chocolate combined with ingredients from local producers, Halifax Hollow and Healing From Foods, created a new take on their rich and thick Parisian-style chocolate drink. Second were toffee and caramel that at the outset of Tavernier would never have made it past the kitchen.

However, with loads of practice and pairing with the right cacao, they are excited about this as a potential new offering. Stay tuned for the exciting roll out in the not-so-distant future of more new creations to tickle your taste buds.

What else does the future hold for Tavernier? They dream of hiring a few more staff, which would allow growth in a thoughtful manner. They never want to remove the hand-made element of their products, but a few more dedicated folx would allow Dar and John to focus more on recipe creation, in-person collaborative tasting events, storytelling, sourcing, and maybe even a vacation. Excitement is building for new chocolate offerings that would potentially bring forth new combinations of flavor and allow for the next phase of their business. Another big dream they have is to open some sort of chocolate experience that would encompass seating for eating, drinking, and enjoying music and art. This would allow their passion as artists and musicians to bring a scene back to Brattleboro they feel is so vital for our community to thrive. Treat yourself or your sweetie to some Tavernier chocolates this February or throughout the year!



We'll be giving away **one Tavernier Chocolate Charcuterie and one Chocolate Bar** to one lucky person.

We are taking online entries from February 1-10.

Read our online **Producer of the Month** article for **Tavernier Chocolates**, click the link at the end of the article, and enter to win!