

From the bean to the bar and beyond...

As a professional expert, Chloe Doutre-Roussel doesn't just know about chocolate. She sleeps, breathes and possibly even bleeds it. From her former position as buyer and manager of Fortnum & Mason's chocolate department, she has now poured all of her world-renowned knowledge into her own company. **SUZANNE TOSH** finds out what its like to be The Queen of Confectionery...

Iwant to acquaint you with an extraordinary woman with an extraordinary job: Chloe Doutre-Roussel who is an international expert in chocolate. I kid you not – this is a real job and what is more, Ms Doutre-Roussel is one of the leaders in her field. She works for many prestigious luxury brands and cocoa producing countries, developing, fine tuning and ultimately launching morsels of heaven onto the high street. Take a breath, it's almost difficult to get past the 'gets paid for eating chocolate' concept isn't it? But there is so much more to it and to her. She is a pioneer, an evangelist and a crusader in the





cause of fine chocolate. As she says: "I have a passion for chocolate, beyond the common I looove chocolate. I am driven by an inside force, blend of creativity, desire for education and justice in the field I know best and like the most, chocolate".

Most recently, she has created Chloe Chocolat, doing all the marketing, product development, management of logistics, PR and

distribution associated with a new brand.

However you may recognise Ms Doutre-Roussel's name from her Fortnum & Mason days. Between 2003 and 2006 she was manager and buyer for the chocolate department at the prestigious store. To place this achievement into the context it deserves, she beat 3,500 rival candidates to attain this massively coveted position thanks to her 'nose' and passion for

chocolate. According to Chloe she used the role "both to excite and surprise her customers, combining the traditional with newer discoveries (with a) particular desire to educate and give her customers the opportunity to experience and appreciate new chocolates".

But let's take it back a bit. How the hell do you get to be an international chocolate consultant - is there a career path if one wants to be the next Queen of Confectionery? I mean throwing in a tribe of Umpa-Lumpas would only make Chloe's career seem a tiny bit less likely. Well, prior to Fortnum's, Chloe was the confectionery manager at Laduree (a luxury patisserie brand based in France and known as the inventor of the double-decker macaroon, 15,000 of which are sold every day). However, I am sorry to say that anyone (myself included) hoping to emulate her success story would have a job.

Though it seems extraordinary, before landing the position at Laduree, Chloe worked in many different fields in many different countries - the only unifying factor being that none of them had anything whatsoever to do with chocolate.

Her CV contains experience including film/advertising; the United Nations and L'Oreal. Academically, she is a qualified engineer in Tropical Agronomy - as far removed from the world of chocolate as possible. But during the 12 years prior to her emergence into the world of confectionery she led a double life, with all her spare time devoted to chocolate; taking courses on the art of tasting chocolate, attending conferences and just, well, eating the stuff.

But this love of all things chocolatey started very early on in her life. At the age of 14, she moved from South America to France and discovered that, from only Nutella and small quantities of Lindt, the range of chocolate now on offer was enormous. So what would any normal 14 year old do? Yes, that's right - she decided to taste them all, taking detailed notes, cataloguing, saving wrappers and comparing textures.

In short, Chloe devoted her life to becoming a self-taught choco expert. There was and is no school to teach what she has learnt; from the bean to the bar and beyond.

Since leaving Fortnum's, Chloe is now using her knowledge and expertise to enlighten the public with "a choco-experience that no other

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brand has so far offered”. Her newly launched products carry the three core values: education, elegance and quality and these, she hopes, will open the eyes of the consumers. In her words, “the world of chocolate has become a chaos”. Brands have mushroomed all over the world, sending out confusing messages of organic or fair trade cocoa beans or even the thorny issue of cocoa percentages. “There are a lot of charlatan brands that stain the beauty of the world of chocolate and sometimes it seems that the horizon is a battlefield”. If Chloe succeeds in her mission, she will educate us all to taste and revere chocolate, without being fooled by the marketing. And she hopes to encourage us all to properly taste the chocolate we buy, arguing that we need to employ all five senses to experience chocolate. By experiencing the best, she argues, we won't put up with second rate, below standard 'designer' fare.

In addition and for the past two years, Chloe has collaborated with the Bolivian Cooperative EL CEIBO to help launch fine chocolate products onto the international market. The first export products, a fine dark chocolate bar and a drinking chocolate, are the first fruits of this collaboration and will be launched in the US and Europe in the autumn of 2008, co-signed.

This major project has meant a great deal of travelling, visiting plantations and factories in far flung destinations, which means adapting and changing your body clock constantly. It's very tiring and “you need to have some ritual discipline to maintain the engine my body and mind are core to all my activities. If I stop, get sick, everything stops”. Which is obviously one of the hardest elements to cope with in her current job; there is no financial security or stability. Apart from that, Ms Doutre-Roussel says she has “total freedom of creativity | make it happen, I feel I can really contribute to make the choco world better”.

So how does a typical day as an international choco expert begin? Very early, at around 5.30 am with a cup of green tea and some chocolate. As a major part of Chloe's qualifications centre on being 'in the know' about all things chocolate, the beginning of the day is also the first tasting session, with a sample tray already waiting. (Just as an aside, Chloe keeps her apartment at a strict 65 degrees - the optimum temperature for storing chocolate). A typical day can involve all the usual phone calls, emails, accounts, business plans that one might expect from a burgeoning business - it's just that it is all about chocolate and helping the world understand and love it a little more a little at a time.

So where does she hope her career path will lead in the short, medium and long-term? “I will concentrate on building the Chloe Chocolate brand with a range of products and hopefully in the medium term, the opening of a shop in Europe”, she says, “I will try to remain an international expert and keep my freedom of speech as much as possible”.

So, what do you think - sounds like a job you could do? Well I enjoy chocolate tremendously and by complete coincidence, bought and read Ms Doutre-Roussel's book some years ago (cover to cover in one sitting - could almost taste the chocolate through the pages).

So am I ready to follow in her footsteps? Well, no this woman is a little awe-inspiring - I mean, there is loving chocolate and living chocolate. She stores dated chocolate bars in her cellar, she wears custom-made dresses with special pockets to accommodate chocolate to nibble on; she eats it at 5am in the morning to ensure that her palate is fresh - you get the impression that she was maybe born to do just one thing. What's more Pierre Herme (The Picasso of Pastry according to Vogue Magazine) named five cocoa-based confections after her. How can you top that? Don't bother trying is my advice. Let us simply take off our hats to a unique individual who is spearheading the education of the world's choco palate. Here's to chocosoulmates everywhere! Hmmm, is anyone else hungry? @

Some chocolate facts...

- Americans eat 2.8 billion pounds of chocolate each year, almost half the world's production.
- Chocolate contains antioxidants which may help prevent cancer and heart disease.
- The word 'chocolate' comes from the Aztec word 'cacahuati' or 'xocolati', meaning 'bitter water'.
- The US army rations include 3 x 40g chocolate bars.
- Cocoa Beans were first brought to Europe by the Spanish conquistadors in 1528.
- Chocolate contains antioxidants which may help prevent cancer and heart disease.
- The biggest chocolate sculpture ever made was a 4,484 lb, ten feet high Easter Egg constructed in Melbourne, Australia.
- During the reign of the Aztecs, a slave could be bought for 100 cocoa beans. The Mayans and Aztecs believed that the bean originated from paradise and would bring wisdom and power to anyone that ate them.
- The biggest chocolate sculpture ever made was a 4,484 lb, ten feet high Easter Egg constructed in Melbourne, Australia.
- Africa now produces over 66% of the world's supply of chocolate.