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Chocolates That Sate Both Eye And Mouth

By Nancy Lewis

Jason Andelman was the pastry chef at Washington's TenPenh Restaurant for five years, but all that time he had a secret passion: chocolate making. While he turned out exquisite desserts like a dark chocolate tart with salty caramel sauce at his full-time job, he made chocolates on the side.

He left the restaurant in August 2005 to pursue his passion, and since June he has been selling his Artisan Confections from a storefront on Lee Highway in Arlington. There is a small retail counter with an open view into the kitchen.

Not only are these confections gorgeous, they are delicious.

Half of his dozen assorted flavors (including lemon hazelnut and Tahitian vanilla bean) feature artworks by Arlington artists—they are silk-screened in cocoa butter on acetate and then transferred to the tiny squares of chocolate. The other selections are in dreamy translucent colors. My favorite, and among the most popular, is the salted butter caramel—it's almost a distillation of that TenPenh dessert.

Unlike the chocolates of my childhood Christmases—the Whitman's Sampler my mother received each year or the musty-smelling cream drops my grandparents bought at the five-and-dime—Andelman's chocolates are made fresh, not weeks or months in advance.



Some of the chocolates feature silk-screened art by local artists.

With only the finest French chocolate, butter and cream, these delightful nuggets are meant to be consumed within days, or at most three weeks, from purchase—not saved and displayed until, say, Easter. Open a box, and you'll be tempted to finish them within hours.

There is also something very individual about these chocolates. Andelman is basically a one-man operation—he personally makes each candy by hand, turning out about 3,000 pieces a week. This is no Lucy-on-the-assembly-line production. Each chocolate requires several steps, over a couple of days. His wife helps with boxing the chocolates and adding the bows, and he will have some part-time help during the holiday season.

The chocolates are also sold at several retail stores and online at www.artisanconfections.com. They are given to guests at some of Washington's boutique hotels.

Artisan Confections, 4815-B Lee Hwy., Arlington, 703-239-0616. Prices range from \$3.75 for two pieces to \$40 for 24 pieces. Hours: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, noon to 4 p.m. Saturday.



Halloween candies that Andelman made for trick-or-treaters.