

the medieval forerunner of chemistry, based on the supposed transformation of matter. It was concerned particularly with attempts to convert base metals into gold or to find a universal elixir.



David Bacco flavors fine chocolates with natural elements

## David Bacco Chocolats

To David Bacco (38), owner of the new David Bacco Chocolat shop at Hilldale Mall, *alchemy* describes everything he sees, smells and tastes while creating his selection of 25 different truffles and bars. Devising that special elixir, that “flavor experience,” as he calls it, is what he feels he does best.

Bacco is no stranger to Madison, having worked at some of the city’s top eateries, including Opera House, Madison Club, Tuscany Mediterranean Grill and most recently, Cocoliquot.

He developed his interest in the sweet confection almost in defiance of chefs he knew who were somewhat reluctant to dip into the practice themselves.

“Many pastry chefs had a phobia about working with chocolates ... the tempering, the principles,” he said, noting that he, too, lacked an understanding of the craft. But that reticence inspired in him a need to learn more. When he finally found his niche, the trade came somewhat naturally.

“Chocolate speaks to you,” Bacco mused. “When it’s at its proper temperature, how it will work.... And being able to focus on something very petite and delicate was something I very much enjoyed.”

Bacco’s decision to forge his own path and open a store was fueled by his success at Cocoliquot, where his craft really gained steam. That, coupled with his designation as the exclusive chocolatier for Madison’s

Chocolate Gala, helped his launch.

Tom Weigand, co-founder of Noodles & Company and investor in several restaurants (including Opera House and Cocoliquot), had sampled Bacco’s concoctions, and was excited about getting the chocolates out to the public, Bacco said. So excited, in fact, that Weigand became not only Bacco’s advisor, but his primary funding source as well.

Weigand said, “I’d seen consumers react very favorably to his chocolates, and having known David for several years, I decided to see if there was a joint venture we could do to take advantage of his talents.”

He and Bacco went to Johnson Bank and took out a loan for \$200,000 to build out the restaurant, pay for start up inventory, and provide some working capital.

Bacco also made a substantial personal investment of his own towards the purchase of equipment, including chocolate molds, machinery for melters, and specialized tools. He had the benefit of having helped build Cocoliquot’s kitchen, which helped on the design of his own store. “I had some knowledge of how things work – and change – on a moment’s notice,” he said.

Today, David Bacco Chocolats has the feel of a fine jewelry store. Dark wooded walls showcase a simple display case along the back, where candies are displayed like jewels in a dizzying array of colors and geometric shapes. Bacco’s inventory includes white, milk, dark and bittersweet chocolates, each blended with unique ingredients.

Depending on the season, Bacco purchases 76 kilos of cocoa or more each month from Chicago importers.

Cocoa is grown near the equator, Bacco explained, in warm, humid climates such as Hawaii, Venezuela, Columbia and even Africa. And it can be good for you, he said. The higher the percentage of cocoa, the more antioxidants and health benefits. For that reason, bittersweet chocolate (not to be confused with ‘dark’ chocolate) offers the greatest health benefits. “The higher the cocoa content, the truer the chocolate,” he said. “You can almost taste the surroundings from where the cocoa plant grew.”

Bacco notes that large American chocolate producers add cocoa butter, milk fats, paraffins and soy oils to their products, which takes away many of the benefits of

the plant. Europeans, by contrast, are exposed to healthier chocolates on a regular basis, which is less fattening and more beneficial overall.

Because of the particular health benefits of bittersweet chocolate, Bacco has also developed seven different ‘Chakra Bars’ based on the body’s “energy centers,” so it is no surprise that his customers range from walk-in mall shoppers and movie-goers to Yoga instructors and meditation groups.

Bacco is a self-taught chocolatier, and he perfects his art through continuing education in Chicago, Las Vegas and Washington, D.C. He categorizes his product into genres, using nature’s elements of earth, air, fire, water and spirit to inspire the flavors. For example, he explained, adding spices to chocolate creates a warmth that puts it in the “fire” genre. Fruits added to chocolate results in a “water” element, teas and florals constitute the “earth,” and nuts, because they’re light and airy, belong under “air.” “Spirit” chocolates are simply those that include cocoa through and through, with little else added.

A typical chocolate truffle will cost about \$1.80, and Bacco sells boxes of two, four, eight and 15 pieces. The store has been well received, he said, primarily because he opened just after Mother’s Day and before graduation weekend. In fact, even Father’s Day became a ‘chocolate holiday,’ which Bacco found pleasantly surprising. His proximity to the Sundance Theater has also been a boon, with moviegoers wanting a pre- or post-movie treat.

In a few short months, David Bacco Chocolats has attracted “a nice lunch and dinner crowd,” continues to receive wedding requests, and is gaining corporate clients. In August, Bacco will unveil a website to facilitate internet orders.

## DAVID BACCO CHOCOLATS

**BUSINESS LOCATION:** 550 N. Midvale Blvd (Hilldale’s outer ring between Cafe Muramoto and Wine Styles)

**WEB:** [www.davidbacco.com](http://www.davidbacco.com)

**PHONE:** 608.233.1600

**TYPE OF BUSINESS:** Specialized chocolate retailer

**EMPLOYEES:** 3 full-time