

THE KNOCKTURNAL

Exclusive Interview With Chocolatier Chi Bui



Popular knowledge claims that only dark chocolate is healthy. The new K+M Extravirgin Chocolate takes it one step further.

Created by renowned Michelin Star Chef Thomas Keller and Olive Oil Producer Armando Manni, K+M has succeeded in creating chocolate that tastes delicious and is packed with antioxidants. Through a custom processing method developed by the team and by adding organic, heart healthy olive oil, K+M has succeeded in preserving a majority of the antioxidants that are lost in traditional chocolate making processes.

We got the chance to speak to Chi Bui, the head chocolatier of K+M Extravirgin Chocolate.

Check out the interview below to learn more about the exciting new chocolate brand. For a full list of K+M Extravirgin Chocolate, visit their website.

The Knockturnal: You have an extensive background as a chocolatier, what inspired you to pursue this direction?

Chi Bui: I spent the earliest part of my childhood in Vietnam, where I was born, and the rest of it in Philadelphia, where my family immigrated to. A lot of my childhood memories revolved around food. Whether it's my first memory of drinking warm milk from a bottle, the wonderful smells and tastes of the pumpkin-peanut soup we regularly had, my first taste of lobster, the precious apple that some generous adult shared among a handful of Vietnamese children in the '70s, my mother's joy of cooking, or the fact that there was always food in the house to feed whoever happened to show up and pay us visit on the weekend.

After working for The United Nations, I took some time off to start a family. The task of preparing meals for my children re-awakened my love for food and engendered the desire to go to culinary school. While I was in culinary school studying pastry, I was introduced to chocolate as a medium. Besides the fact that I loved eating chocolate, I loved the precision it required and how interesting it was scientifically speaking. It became a natural extension for me to move into focusing solely on chocolate, after working in the pastry section of some of New York's most esteemed restaurants.

The Knockturnal: How did you get involved with K+M?

Chi Bui: It was through Per Se and the French Laundry's Executive Pastry Chef, Elwyn Bolyes, that I got to meet Thomas and then Armando. After I heard what they were trying to achieve with chocolate, I was so intrigued by the concept and approach that I couldn't see myself not getting involved and I fully committed to help make it happen. It's truly a rare opportunity to be able to work on something that piqued all of my interests and curiosities especially to be able to do so with two great individuals who share the same approach and philosophy to food and ingredients. I'm grateful to both Thomas and Armando for the trust and opportunity they've provided me.

The Knockturnal: Did you also play a hand in sourcing the cocoa beans for the K+M line?

Chi Bui: Traveling to remote areas in search of uniquely indistinct beans, visiting growers, evaluating the post-harvest handling, and connecting with our local partners on the ground are the first essential steps in our process. It is here that I dedicate my time and efforts to ensure we get the best cocoa beans. Beans that pass my organoleptic evaluations are then sent to the University of Florence to be tested for their antioxidant and volatile compound potential. Once the beans pass this scientific evaluation process, we then purchase directly from the source.

Our approach to chocolate making places great importance on the quality, purity, flavor expressions, complexity, and diversity in characteristics of the cocoa beans. We therefore have a very stringent criteria for sourcing. We look for uniquely aromatic and complex beans that are farmed sustainably. We want to develop lasting, first-hand relationships with growers and partners on the ground for direct purchasing of the beans and the ability to customize the fermentation process. This is a challenge that takes time and has to be developed anew with each different origin [of beans].

The Knockturnal: What is next in store for K+M?

Our focus is to continue working on improving what we do, to innovate, and to search for new origins to work with.