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Hofssi Chocolates - Chocolatieres of Lamorinda

By Sophie Braccini



Sisters Linda Hofmeister, left, and Susan Rossi show their creations. Photo Sophie Braccini

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The sisters' adventure has been some years in the making. Hofmeister and Rossi were born five years apart in a family of seven. Rossi, a lawyer with a baking undercurrent, started making sweets when she was 10, while Hofmeister was a commercial lender, described by her sister as an artist always ready to explore new forms and techniques. They both lived in Lamorinda until 12 years ago when Hofmeister moved to Minnesota; she has been back in Moraga now for a few months.

While Hofmeister prepared to move her family back to Lamorinda, Rossi took classes. "I trained with Ecole Chocolat, a very comprehensive online school," explains the Moraga mom. "They have a lot of videos, and every type of chocolate transformation is practiced. I learned how to temper chocolate, how to move the hands and tools, and one day we made gianduja. I could not believe what I was tasting, it was so good, and no one else had it."

Both Rossi and her sister have high food standards. "We call it conscious consumption," says Hofmeister. They select organic ingredients every time it is possible, and will experiment as long as needed to make it work. For the gianduja, Rossi uses raw California organic almonds and Oregon organic hazelnuts from Honor Earth Farms. They use the Guittard organic line, and add organic powdered sugar and dairy from local organic farms to their chocolate and toffees, which Hofmeister made for years as gifts for friends at Christmastime. Hofmeister also makes caramels in a variety of flavorful combinations: classic sea salt, coffee, chocolate, coffee/almond/cocoa nib and a more exotic cardamom/ginger/cashew, and dark or milk chocolate covered sea salt.

Both Hofmeister and Rossi have Cottage Food Operator licenses, which allows them to make and market food items from their homes. Susan Marconi at Across the Way in Moraga was the first

When most people hear the word gianduja, the first thing that comes to mind probably is not chocolate. The delicious blend of roasted nuts and chocolate was born in Italy in 1806. Napoleon's Continental Blockade of British imports created a cocoa shortage that led Italian bakers in the Piedmont area to reduce the amount of cocoa in their chocolate recipe and substitute it with roasted hazelnuts. Gianduja is the main product of Moraga-based Hofssi Chocolates.

Sisters Linda Hofmeister and Susan Rossi, owners of Hofssi - the name a combination of the chocolatiers' last names - started making the concoction in their homes. Hofssi's gianduja consists of 40 percent nuts, ground to a very thin powder, mixed with dark or milk chocolate and wrapped in foil. The darkest chocolates are their best sellers, appreciated by those who want intense flavor. They also make toffees and caramels for demanding foodies as part of their cottage business.

"Four years ago, Linda started making chocolate," says Rossi. "She went to Costa Rica, visited farms, learned about the industry and techniques that transform the beans. Then a year ago, she called me and told me she was ready to start a business." At the time, with her children starting to be more independent, Rossi was thinking of restarting her law career. "I decided to join my sister instead."

retailer to take in Hofssi products. "It sells very well," says the store manager. "When I cut out small pieces for people to taste, it is a sure way to see it go very fast." Other retail outlets in Lafayette also carry Hofssi Chocolates: Floret at 3581 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lazy K - the Orchard Nursery gift shop, Diablo Foods, and Clocks Etc. in La Fiesta Square. Orinda Books will offer the products in December.

"When I'd like Hofssi to be in a store, I just go in, give them samples and show them the packaging," says Rossi. "If you catch them at a good time, people love it."

The two sisters have many creative ideas on how to grow their business.

"I'd love to have a store," says Rossi, "but we do not want it to become too big because it is important for us to control the quality of our products."

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