

So I can dive in without guilt?

It's chocolate, and it's good. What more do you need? Oh, it's fair trade and organic too, **Sarina Talip** writes

If there was one place that captured my imagination more than Disneyland when I was a little girl it was Willy Wonka's chocolate factory. A whole magical factory where orange-skinned, green-haired pygmy-sized workers, Oompa-Loompas, make only confectionery? And what confectionery. Everlasting Gobstoppers. Lickable wallpaper. But the most amazing thing (and I wanted it in my own garden) was the chocolate river and waterfall.

The chocolate pouring out of the machine in front of me is not exactly a waterfall, more of a steady trickle. And I am not exactly in a chocolate factory, but more of a small commercial kitchen in Fairbairn, where Lindsay and Edmunds' delicately handcrafted organic and fair-trade chocolates are created. But I still must have a bit of the little girl in me because I am nearly passing out from excitement at being surrounded by so much chocolate. And what chocolate. Tiny snow-capped mountains with whole roasted hazelnuts inside. Creamy white chocolate flecked with vanilla bean.

Chocolatier Peter Edmunds has just finished dripping dark chocolate criss-crosses from a



plastic "pipe" over the truffles with medjool date from California, roasted almond, coconut and cognac centres.

Now he has moved on to making slab chocolate, catching the liquid dark chocolate pouring out of the chocolate tempering machine into a plastic mould, swirling the chocolate around the mould to fill in the gaps, then sprinkling pepitas and slivers of dried paw paw and pineapple over.

Edmunds dreamed up the deliberately funky Lindsay and Edmunds brand with his wife Michelle Fahy while living in Caen, Normandy. They fell in love with the local chocolatier's individual handmade chocolates and indulged in a different one after dinner each night. "French chocolate is more about the quality than the quantity. You don't need to have a whole lot of it, which is why we called our first range petits morceaux – little pieces."

Returning to Australia, they spent the first nine months of 2008 doing research and trialling chocolates at markets, and launched the brand in October at the farmers market at Exhibition Park. They now also sell their chocolates at the Old Bus Depot Markets in Kingston and the

Southside Farmers Market in Woden. Edmunds says they get so many interstate tourists visiting the markets they are working on a new website and online shop. While Edmunds makes the chocolates, Fahy focuses on the marketing.

Edmunds and Fahy only moved to Canberra (and the Fairbairn kitchen) in March. They were living on the central coast near Gosford, but found the markets at Exhibition Park so successful that the move was necessary. Edmunds says the kitchen is "fantastic".

"It was so well set up. Basically we walked in, plugged in our machines and we were ready to go. And it's away from the hustle and bustle and still rural, with kangaroos hopping around ... ducks."

The move has proved fruitful. In December last year, Lindsay and Edmunds had two stockists. Today that has expanded to 25, mainly in Canberra, including Manuka Fine Foods, Mountain Creek Whole Foods in Griffith, the Mart Delicatessen at the Fyshwick markets, and Wilson's Organics in Farrer.

They also have stockists in Sydney, Bowral, Cootamundra and on the South Coast, and have started sending chocolate to a Queensland distributor, which will supply to a few cafes. But Edmunds is confident he will be able to double that list to 50 stockists by Christmas.

They have also just invested \$50,000 in a new chocolate tempering machine that can temper 90kg of chocolate in an hour. "But physically, we can't hand-make that much chocolate," Edmunds chuckles. They will still use their old machine, which can temper 4kg of chocolate, for white chocolate.

So what is the secret ingredient to their success in a tough marketplace? Kingston chocolatier All Things Chocolate closed up shop in June last year after seven years in the business. But Lindsay and Edmunds is still competing against the Curious Chocolatier in Tuggeranong, Robyn Rowe in Murrumbateman, and Melbourne-based Koko Black, which makes its chocolates in its Civic cafe.

Edmunds believes it's not just one secret ingredient, but many raw organic ingredients in unique combinations. The most important is the fair trade and organic Belgian chocolate they use, called Belcolade. Lindsay and Edmunds has just won its organic and fair trade certification, and is the only chocolatier in Australia, Edmunds believes, that makes both fair trade and organic handmade chocolates. This is something Canberrans appreciate.

"Before we were fair trade, it was amazing how many people would ask, are you fair trade? Canberrans are very aware when it comes to food. It's a very educated food market and that's one of the keys to our success."

For Edmunds, knowing his chocolate is fair trade means his conscience is clear. Belcolade uses cacao from the Dominican Republic.

"We know being a single-origin chocolate it's 100 per cent traceable back to the farms that it comes from and we know we're always going to have that consistent quality," he says.

"Whereas [with] most commercial chocolate



you don't know where the beans come from. It's a commodity that gets traded on the stock exchange and all the beans get mixed in together. You don't know if child slavery is being used, you don't know if the growers are being paid a fair price."

From a taste point of view, it also means he is using "one of the best chocolates in the world". "[Chocolate from the Dominican Republic] has its own distinct flavour. Like how a wine from the Hunter Valley is going to be very different from one from the Barossa – it's like that with chocolate."

Edmunds believes even his white chocolate, that most misunderstood of foods that the Mayans used to call the food of the gods, is something special. "Most people are like, yuck, white chocolate, it tastes disgusting. And I say, oh, but you haven't tasted real white chocolate." His white chocolate is 29 per cent cocoa butter. "Most commercial white chocolate doesn't have any cocoa butter in at all – it's not real chocolate."

The dark chocolate contains 72 per cent cocoa solids. "A lot of dark chocolates that are 70 per cent and above [cocoa] can have quite a bitter aftertaste."

But the reason why the Belcolade dark chocolate doesn't have that aftertaste remains "a closely guarded secret from the actual chocolate manufacturer".

"We can only assume that they use a very high percentage of cocoa butter," Edmunds says. "Cocoa butter is the more expensive ingredient than cocoa, which makes it very smooth on the palate and very rich."

Like Willy Wonka, Edmunds hands me a dark chocolate with candied orange rind in the centre to demonstrate. And, like a little girl, I chomp it down in one bite, the orange a sweet and pleasant

zing after the – yes – velvety smoothness of the dark chocolate.

The chocolate costs 30 per cent more than non-organic chocolate from the same manufacturer, but Edmunds and Fahy try to price their chocolates around the same price as non-organic and non-fair-trade chocolatiers.

Edmunds says, "There's a perception in the marketplace that as soon as something is organic, people try and charge heaps more for it, and if that perception stays then organic will never become mainstream. Part of our philosophy is we want our product to be seen as in the mainstream from a pricing point of view."

"Having said that, it's still an expensive product because the chocolate itself is so expensive and everything is handmade and packaged [by hand] – there's nothing going through on a conveyor belt and being dropped in a box or in a bag."

Edmunds says each chocolate is handled at least eight times. And that is not including the preparation that goes into the raw organic ingredients.

The orange rind, for example, takes a week to make. Edmunds and his assistant Rohan Todd peel the organic oranges themselves, dice the orange peel, blanch it three times, then cook it in water and organic sugar for five hours. They spread the peel out on trays and then dry it slowly over four to five days, turning the pieces every few hours.

"If there's any moisture, it becomes a problem," Edmunds explains.

The chocolatier originally trained as a chef and is passionate about what exactly goes into his chocolate. "Most [commercial chocolate makers] use orange oil and it ruins the chocolate because it has a funny aftertaste."