

Specialty Food Packaging Design



by Reynaldo Alejandro
with the

N·A·S·F·T

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
FOR THE SPECIALTY FOOD TRADE, INC.

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FOREWORD

A Perfect Combination of Beauty and Taste

The specialty food industry in the U.S. has thrived by developing top-quality products, and presenting them in packaging that appeals to the aesthetic tastes of sophisticated consumers.

In the March/April 1989 issue of NASFT Showcase, the National Association for the Specialty Food Trade, Inc., asked manufacturers/importers/distributors and retailers to rank 12 factors that influence whether consumers will purchase new specialty food products. Both groups ranked packaging as the most important factor, followed by the uniqueness of the product.

In an effort to match and exceed the packaging beauty of European specialty foods, American manufacturers have greatly upgraded the appearance of their products. Today, attractively packaged European imports and American-produced foods vie for the attention of specialty food shoppers.

It makes economic sense for specialty food manufacturers to devote energy and money to producing beautiful packaging. Since most of these foods are produced in a limited quantity, attention to detail is the rule. Unlike mass-produced foods, these items are not coming off factory production lines in which the time and cost of production are the ruling factors. Rather, most specialty foods are produced and packaged in small production facilities or by hand. Close attention can then be paid to the beauty of the packaging as well as the quality of the food.

In addition, the egos of the entrepreneurs who create these foods demand that the quality of the package reflects the quality of the product. Specialty food manufacturers and importers are proud of their products, and want them presented in the best possible way.

These entrepreneurs do not have the funds to hire the big-name package designers who create products for major food corporations. They either have the work done by unknown yet highly creative designers, or they do it themselves. The creativity that they put into their product is reflected in the ingenuity of their packaging.

As you can see in this beautiful book, the packaging developed by U.S. specialty food manufacturers and importers is truly exquisite. From Italian-designed packages that hold tasty chocolates to eye-catching graphics developed by food producers with an eye for the bold, the packages that contain products sold by the 1,200 members of the National Association for the Specialty Food Trade, Inc., are truly works of art. That will be evident as you peruse the hundreds of photographs published in this beautiful book.

RONALD TANNER

NASFT Communications Director

INTRODUCTION

No longer the purchases of the well-to-do, the specialty food industry is booming.

"Fancy foods are really mainstream today," says Mona Doyle of The Consumer Network, which surveys more than 4,500 consumers about their product preferences every month. "Specialty foods are a piece of the good life almost everyone can afford. The appreciation and recognition of specialty food is growing and will continue to grow." *

The rise of money-laden, young, urban professional consumers and an influx of exotic and unique cuisine has created a marketplace for gourmet and unusual food items.

Gourmet bake shops, specialty coffee and tea emporiums, confectionery stores and high-end, quality-conscious supermarkets are booming. Today's consumer demands quality, taste and health, and is willing to pay for it.

Contained within these pages are examples of some of the premium specialty food items available today. These select food products were chosen for their unique packaging. Other criteria included: esthetic value, ease of display, interplay between package and product, logoture, graphics, illustration, packaging material, new production technology and ease of use.

Welcome to the world of specialty food; we hope you enjoy this book as much as we do.

** As appeared in the March/April 1989 edition of NASFT Showcase.*

Chapter One

FINE CANDIES CHOCOLATES

Chocolate, one of life's sweetest pleasures, is an addiction almost impossible to break. "But the good news," according to chocolate expert Joan Steur of New York, Chocolate Marketing Inc., "is chocolate is not 'bad' for your health. Chocolate," Steur said in an interview with *Gourmet Today*, "is low in sodium, does not contain caffeine, does not promote acne or tooth decay and is not fattening in small amounts."

Statistics show that consumers are not giving up chocolate despite dire predictions from medical professionals regarding the sugar and cholesterol content. According to a study commissioned by the National Confectioners Association, the National Candy Wholesalers Association and the Chocolate Manufacturers Association, confectionery sales have increased 43 percent since 1982. Nine out of ten U.S. households buy confections, while 56 percent buy and eat candies every week.

Chocolate represents just over half of the \$8 billion U.S. candy industry. In the next five years, most of us will consume over 60 pounds of chocolate. "People want to indulge, both for themselves and for gifts," said Van Billington, executive director of Retail Confectioners International, whose membership consists of some 600 manufacturers/retailers.

Despite its stable position in the market, price, packaging and taste are challenges for retailers. Diet-conscious consumers, meanwhile, are looking for chocolate low in sugar, fat and cholesterol.

Health concerns have changed Americans' perceptions regarding confections. Few consumers consider candy a "healthful snack" and eight out of 10 surveyed say that candy contains more sugar than is good for them. To satisfy the sweet tooth of consumers who feel guilty about eating regular confections, several companies now offer sugar-free and low-fat candies.

Other manufacturers have reduced the butterfat and sugar content of their candies, so a diet truffle contains 40 calories, versus 80 to 100 calories for a conventional version. Sugar-free candies and chocolates are not necessarily low in calories, as some customers mistakenly presume. Many sugar-free confections sweetened with mannitol or other sugar-free products are also heavy in fat from nuts and rich chocolate.

Chocolate has come a long way since the Aztecs introduced the *xocolatl* brew in the 1500s to Spanish explorers. In 1756, it was first manufactured in the United States, now the world's leading producer. Today, gourmet chocolate stores sell dozens of flavors by the piece or by the pound. Old and new recipes are spurring product growth as both imported and domestic brands vie for market share.

Smaller-sized confections and creative designs are also in fashion. Many prestigious manufacturers favor small moulded chocolates over the larger-sized bars and candies. As one New York retailer says, "People want to treat themselves to something that's rich. A truffle the size of a golf ball is too much of a good thing — then it's not a treat, it's a full dessert."

One retail outlet has a product line that comes in the shape of small seashells, decorated in hues of white, milk and dark chocolate. Truffles are now packaged in symmetrical mounds often topped with pastel swirls, while novelties can be anything from chocolate greeting cards to figurines. But the smart money is on chocolate creations such as long stemmed roses, oversized kisses, angel figures, golf bags, license plates and lipstick tubes.

Current best sellers include truffles, chocolate-dipped potato chips and pretzels, fruits, nuts, Turtles, sugar-free and low-sugar products, chocolate bark, novelties, upscale chocolate bars, fudge and chocolate sauces. The popularity of macadamia nuts, pecans and almonds—all homegrown items—contribute to the appeal of barks and brittles. Market analysts predict that other American classics such as marshmallow cups, peanut butter cremes and fruit fillings will be future sizzlers.

Among imported brands, retailers say that Italian and Swiss confections are getting the most attention and business. Truffles, liqueur fillings and white chocolate are among the chief European influences on the U.S. market. While most state laws still allow no more than 0.5 percent liquor content in confections, some states are lifting restrictions.

As imports of liqueur-filled chocolates gain popularity, domestic manufacturers are making plans for their own product lines. Liqueur-filled candies give consumers a chance to be risqué without becoming intoxicated. Since the cost of fine imported chocolates has risen in proportion to U.S. dollar's decline, some retailers are bringing chocolate production in-house.

Another noticeable consumer trend is the movement away from milk chocolate—long the American preference. As consumers become more sophisticated, white chocolate from European chocolatiers and dark bittersweet chocolates are becoming a mainstream taste. Outside of metropolitan areas, however, retailers say that milk chocolate is still the preferred choice.

Equally significant is the trend toward sugar-free chocolate. "Chocolate is an addictive food," said Bob MacLachlan, president of the consulting firm, H.M. International, in an interview with *Fancy Food*. "It has caffeine and phenylethylamine which can give the nervous system a kick and elevate mood." The demand for sucrose-free chocolate is increasing, particularly among diabetics and people with dental concerns.

Recent studies at the Forsyth Dental Center in Boston, however, cite an ingredient in chocolate as a barrier to tooth decay. Chocolatiers can thus appeal to the safe pleasures of eating chocolates. Still, a number of manufacturers are producing "healthy" chocolates that are either sugar-free, dairy-free, or cholesterol-free. Tofu and cocoa butter, a highly saturated fat, are often used in "chocolate for the healthy gourmet." Fat content, however, is the biggest stumbling block in producing low-calorie chocolates. At an average of 150 calories and 11 grams of fat per ounce, even sugarless chocolate is fattening.

As the chocolate and confectionery market becomes more competitive, retailers are facing customers who are conscious of quality and are willing to pay for it. Packaging is another factor that influences purchasing decisions.

"Packaging is something you can enhance or even create at your store." A Michigan-based chocolatier explains, "Packaging plays a tremendous role in sales and this is where we can offer originality. For a special gift, we'll stack three or four boxes on top of each other and put it together with beautifully-colored ribbons and bows."

Other retailers custom-package their goodies in baskets, tins and mugs. For real "chocoholics," retailers may wish to design a "chocolate" basket with multi-colored tissues, iridescent cellophane and bright ribbons wrapped around the handles.

Taste is another important consideration. For maximum freshness, small orders are advised for retailers. Lots of variety is a further attraction to customers.

One big challenge for retailers is the off-season slump. In the summertime, people lean toward cooler treats. "Don't let chocolate become a wallflower during the summer," warned chocolatier Lucille Hauser in an interview with *Gourmet Today*. "Encourage your customers to serve chocolate when entertaining. It is a perfect no-bake dessert for the summertime." Chocolate gourmet sauces are also delicious on both ice cream and fruit.