



DV ARTISAN

CHOCOLATE

BY EUGENE YIGA

Pieter de Villiers, owner and CEO of DV Artisan Chocolate, is South Africa's first bean-to-bar chocolate maker.

WHAT PRODUCTS DO YOU MAKE?

At the top of the pyramid we have our 'niche' product, which are our single-origin chocolate bars. In this range, the bean tells the story. Our second tier focuses on Africa. In this range, we play with unique flavour combinations, combining spices and dried fruit with the chocolate.

This is primarily a 70% dark chocolate range. Our third tier, which has wider appeal, is where we focus on unique combinations in not such a 'bitter' range of chocolate – more milk chocolate and white chocolate – and includes combinations made in our kitchens like caramel and honeycomb.

WHICH ARE MOST POPULAR?

All the chocolates in the Sweet Handcrafted range, especially the milk chocolate which includes confections like biscotti and caramel.

WHERE DO YOU SOURCE YOUR RAW MATERIALS?

All our raw materials are non-GM [genetically modified] products. Our cocoa beans are sourced directly from farmers in different regions of the world and all of our other ingredients are sourced in South Africa, as closely to the originator as possible.

HOW MANY PEOPLE DO YOU EMPLOY?

We currently employ 25 permanent staff. However, with chocolate being a seasonal product, and with more than half of our sales occurring in the months of November through to January, we also employ a lot of seasonal staff over this period, which can be up to double our normal staff members.

WHY IS BEING AN ETHICAL BUSINESS IMPORTANT TO YOU?

In my 'prior' life I worked as a control engineer for large manufacturing and mining companies, where the focus was on the automation of manufacturing processes. In that world everything focuses on efficiency as it is a world driven by profitability. As a result, everything is automated and 'divorced' from authenticity.

Because we live in a modern world, where marketing departments with large budgets put a different spin on products, I believe the only way to survive in this environment is to be authentic to ourselves and our stories. You shouldn't have to look for a fancy wrapper with a different story than what you are selling.



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Your product should reflect the story of you and your business.

WHAT SETS YOU APART FROM COMPETITORS?

If you consider the consumer environment we are in, then you realise that one isn't just competing with chocolate; we are also competing in other 'boutique' categories like gourmet food and single origin coffee. However, I do believe that our product would sell better if it had MORE competition, as this would result in the consumer seeing us as a category instead of trying to place it. Take, for example, the craft beer industry. There are several craft brewers around and all are growing.

WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

Being the first bean-to-bar chocolate producers in South Africa, our biggest challenge is defining the single-origin bean-to-bar category. Our hope is that more companies embrace this category, which will grow the perception of the consumer. In America, the bean-to-bar chocolate movement started with few and there are now more than 50 bean-to-bar chocolate makers there. Something similar will happen in South Africa and we are proud to be at the forefront of it.

WHAT ARE THE PLANS FOR GROWTH?

We've now realised that we have something that we can scale in two environments: we can grow our retail footprint and increase our direct exposure to the consumers. Our goal for the next year is to grow both of these in South Africa. We will focus on growing our presence in local retail environments and we will also open about four or five concept stores. These will focus mostly on the brand and the 'brand story'.

Following that initial phase, we believe that we have a special story to tell and a special product focusing on Africa that we can sell internationally. Thereafter, our focus will be on international markets. This will keep us quite busy over the next year or three!

BUY DV ARTISAN CHOCOLATES FROM THE PRODUCTION FACILITY AND SHOP AT SPICE ROUTE IN PAARL (WESTERN CAPE) AND SELECTED WOOLWORTHS OUTLETS. LEARN MORE AT WWW.DVCHOCOLATE.COM.



