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KOKO MONK'S ONE-OF-A-KIND CHOCOLATES

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By Arlene Kobelka-Lender
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CHOCOLATE/VANCOUVER

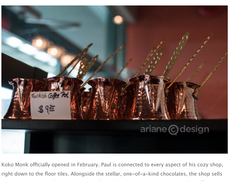
Chocolatier **Paul Dincer** didn't start out with a passion for creating handmade, hand-tempered and painted chocolates. His story began in Turkey, where 13 years of writing (with two published books) left him longing for the perfect place in the world where he could continue his writing.

His conclusion? **It doesn't exist.**

He did however head to Australia to study business administration. He there met an Italian chef, the two worked together for six years. The next chapter of his life brought him to Vancouver, BC, where he started to create chocolates out of his home, transforming his kitchen into a commercial one.

Paul's first foray into the chocolate business was through Kitsilano's pocket farmers' markets by the Kits Neighbourhood House. There he met other likeminded passionate farmers and artisan product makers, further fuelling his desire to open a chocolate shop.

Three years at weekend farmers' markets (as Levni Chocolates) in both the West End and Kitsilano laid the groundwork for opening his first retail space in Kitsilano.



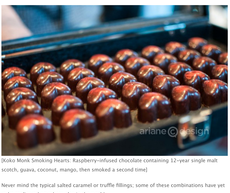
Koko Monk officially opened in February. Paul is connected to every aspect of his cozy shop, right down to the floor tiles. Alongside the stellar, one-of-a-kind chocolates, the shop sells pastries created by a German pastry chef, as well as hot chocolate and specialty coffees.

Paul feels a particular connection with Kitsilano. With Pfleger German deli, Rocky Mountain Flatbread Pizza, and the soon-to-open Krokodile Pear Organic Juice as neighbours, he's in good company.

Our small media group took up the entire space, spread out over two tables. We sampled six chocolates from his collection. Paul explained that his chocolates are inspired by post-modern concepts, each one containing a unique flavour composition.

[Koko Monk's Old Man and The Sea]

Every one of his chocolates tell a story. Witness **The Old Man and the Sea**, inspired from the Hemingway novel. The colours form the sea, the shape mimics the waves, and the inside contains watermelon and sea salt.



[Koko Monk Smoking Hearts: Raspberry-infused chocolate containing 12-year single malt scotch, guava, coconut, mango, then smoked a second time]

Never mind the typical salted caramel or truffle fillings; some of these combinations have yet to be replicated anywhere else in the world.

From **La Petite Amour**, a maple leaf chocolate with mango, lemongrass, and lime to **Smoking Heart**, a raspberry-infused chocolate containing 12-year single malt scotch, guava, coconut, mango, then smoked a second time, and taken out of a wooden box for tasting, Paul knows how to knock your tastebuds for a loop!

[Koko Monk La Petite Amour: mango, lemongrass, lime]

We tasted each chocolate without knowing what was inside, allowing our palates to experience the slowly-melting components before knowing the name and ingredients of each, making for a true savouring experience.

[Koko Monk Zentropy: Wasabi, ginger, orange chocolate]

"My chocolates demand that you slow down to fully experience them." – Paul Dincer

[Koko Monk's Bachanalia]

I particularly enjoyed the Bachanalia, with balsamic vinegar caramel, sea salt and a hint of orange. Each ingredient hit my palate at a different moment.

Paul takes a primary essence and finds an unorthodox flavour to add a distinct dimension, then compliments that duo with a third (and sometimes fourth) ingredient. I compared this process to painting a canvas. These pieces must be experienced in person; each chocolate is hand-painted and stands apart in colour and form.

Peering through the glass case, I can see why Paul's got fans as far away as Belgium ordering his chocolates. This has to be the highest form of flattery for a local chocolate maker whose creativity on paper led him to sparking our tastebuds.

[Koko Monk's Blue Moon]

Koko Monk is located at **1849 West 1st Avenue** in Kitsilano. Visit the website for more information. *Non-watermarked images courtesy of Koko Monk.*

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