



Vancouver chocolatier creates poetry with ‘mouthfuls of multi-dimensional electrocution’

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Vancouver chocolate maker Paul Dincer starts with a core story or image and swaddles it in chocolate. A sweet he calls Juliet’s Whip was born from Romeo’s first meeting with Juliet in Act I of Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet.

The two exchange kisses that inflame their love and seal their eventual death.

How do you squash love and death into a chocolate? If you’re Dincer, you use three ingredients to build a bridge between the couple’s ecstasy and despair.

“The flavours I developed were green mandarin to represent Juliet and bergamot to represent Romeo. The last flavour is rosemary, representing death,” the head of Levni Chocolates says.

“When the chocolate melts in your mouth, at first you will taste green mandarin, 10 seconds later it will be dominated by bergamot and 10 seconds after that both of them will be buried under that earthy flavour of rosemary.”

B.C. already has plenty of first-rate chocolatiers large and small. Dincer admits, with a chuckle, it really didn’t need another.

So he tries to be something more than a single-track chocolatier, drawing from 13 years as a writer in his native Turkey to fuse the worlds of art and taste.

Dincer, 40, creates what he describes as mouthfuls of multi-dimensional electrocution. Levni flavours are meant — in theory — to refer to emotions, themes and narrative fragments from painting, literature, film, real life.

A chocolate called “Leningrad,” which mixes vodka and espresso, is meant to help you share — but survive — the fate of Russian heroine Anna Karenina. The chocolate should allow you to taste her sorrow before she commits suicide by letting a train hit her.

On one level, the vibrating marriage of blue cheese and candied pear in “Blue Moon” evoke the nude prostitutes in Picasso’s cubist masterpiece Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. No. 145).

On another level, Dincer’s ingredients will taste just as wild whether or not you give a damn about Tolstoy or Picasso.

“My techniques are totally unorthodox,” the moderately Young Turk says. “What I’m doing, nobody else is doing.

Nobody else, safe to say, has taken Dincer’s path to the chocolatier’s trade. Born Suleyma Dincer, he graduated from university in Ankara with a degree in the theory and history of drama.

After university, he worked as a government film evaluator, assessing proposed movie projects. On the side, he wrote poetry, two books on Turkish cinema and moonlighted as a script consultant.

But Dincer’s no nerd — he also penned television soap operas, an experience reflected in some of the larger-than-life descriptions of chocolates on his website: Levnichocolate.com.

After he learned the rudiments of English by immersing himself in Michael Crichton’s novel Jurassic Park — “a funny way to learn English” — he moved to Australia to earn a master’s degree in business information systems.

“It was another disappointment, of course,” he says. “There is no institution that teaches you how to make money. They teach you how to work successfully for somebody else.”

While doing his business degree, he also learned pastry making, a skill he eventually taught at college in Melbourne.

He moved to Canada to do a PhD in film. When his planned studies didn’t work out, he worked in the Vancouver grocery business.

In 2010, he started Levni, named after an Ottoman Empire court painter of the late 17th century.

“Chocolates are a perfect conjunction of everything I’ve done in my life,” he says. “They’re totally personal. You can’t compete with that.”

He currently makes his chocolates by hand at a small facility in south Vancouver. Sixty per cent of his chocolate is organic and fair trade, while 80 per cent of his other ingredients are raw and organic.

Customers comment, to Dincer’s alarm, that his chocolates are so pretty they should simply be admired for their looks.

“That scares me,” he says. “It means they’re not being eaten.”

So far, he and four part-time employees have been selling Levni chocolates at local markets — he currently has a booth at the Vancouver Christmas Market — and online.

Prices online range from \$12.95 for a box of three to \$65.95 for a 24-piece box.

Next month, Dincer will open a boutique on West 1st in Kitsilano to be called Levni’s Koko Monk. But Belgium and Italy are his two biggest international markets.

“I think the Belgians got bored from eating the same chocolates for the last couple of hundred years,” he says.

“The ingredients of my chocolates are like words in a poem. When you put them together, you get flavours that never existed before.”

The names themselves of Levni’s 22 types of chocolate sound as if they’re plucked from erotic verse: Sultry Drift, First Kiss, Musee L’Amour.

A creation called La Mer is said to reproduce the precise amount of salt you taste when kissing a person emerging from the ocean. Chances are the research for that one was more fun than Jurassic Park.

Dincer’s gourmet chocolates place high demands on consumers’ palates. You don’t chew them; you take small bites, and pause to let the chocolate melt.

“If you’re a Kit Kat eater, keep walking. You’re not one of my customers.”

Dincer draws special attention to Smoking Hearts. Raspberry and tropical fruit purée, Glenfiddich scotch and chocolate unfurl in apple wood-smoked sequence.

“It’s the most sophisticated chocolate on the planet, at the moment,” Dincer insists.

“It’s a way to relieve the loneliness of the fast food eater. To take anything meaningful from this chocolate, you have to slow down.

“The chocolate will then take control.”

