



## Expert Seasonal Chocolate: Cooking with Andrew Shotts

*Emily Stone*

When I saw the bright orange Garrison Confections van parked on West 12th Street in Manhattan, I knew Andrew Shotts was inside the James Beard House. That was two weeks ago, and, in fact, I would have known that the chocolatier from Rhode Island was there even without the visual cue. He was prepping for the “Ultimate Chocolate Lovers’ Brunch,” a seven-course event for members of the James Beard Foundation and other New York culinary glitterati, and he’d invited me to hang around the kitchen.

I walked in at 10:30, and Drew’s crew (the candymakers from his shop in Providence, a former employee who’s about to start a gig as pastry chef at Dovetail, and at least one culinary-student volunteer) had been at work since dawn. Someone in a white apron ushered me upstairs, where I was greeted by a man with an impressive stature and an equally impressive accent. “Are you here to do the flowers?” he asked me.

“I could be,” I answered. I came to write about Drew and his chocolate, but I’ve tried as hard as possible to do away with the traditional costume of a journalist. I don’t want to be a dispassionate critic, a disinterested third-party, a disembodied person. So if someone needs me to do the flowers, I’m happy to help. Of course, I had no idea how to do the flowers. Drew did. “I’ve done a lot of flower arranging in my life--don’t hold it against me,” he said as he bounded into the room. He patiently watched me snip each stem, suggesting I line them up at the end of the table to ensure they were all the same height. “I think you’ll



find that I’m a good teacher,” he’d told me, outlining his stint at Orlando’s Notter School of Pastry Arts, when we first met over the phone. He is indeed. He re-clipped the occasionally flower that morning at the Beard House, but he was nothing but gracious about my help. I’d learn chocolate-making, flower-arranging, or anything else from the man.

Flowers done, we headed down to the kitchen. While his assistant Kendra checked on the chilled rectangles of Troika Tea-Scented Cream with Citrus Gelée and Crispies, Drew explained his plans for the future of Garrison Confections. He mentioned that he and his wife are planning to rev up their public image, something that might allow them to drive their headquarters back to New York, a city Garrison Confections left behind for New England four years ago. “The market is saturated with bon bons,” he told me. “Name one flavor that hasn’t been done in a chocolate bon bon? Aztec, Mayan, Martian, tobacco, smoked tea--lapsang souchong--which tastes like horse shit....” He wants to move beyond ganache-filled, square-shaped candies adorned with the transfer-sheet designs that ceased being innovative a decade ago. “I’m exploring a couple of things that I’ve never seen on the market,” he said.

But as the noon deadline for setting the tables approached, Drew talked less about candy and more about the mole for his pork hors d’oeuvre and the herbs for his “Poulet Noir Ravioli with Chocolate Carbonara.” “We need big pots of water for the ravioli!” he announced to his attentive kitchen staff. “We need to start frying the goat cheese in five minutes!” This time, I decided to spare the chef the offer to help.

In the brownstone’s foyer, I met Food & Wine Senior Editor and



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(fiction writer) Ray Isle. The person responsible for all the wine pairings in the magazine, Ray served as sommelier for the Chocolate Lovers' Brunch. Drew emerged from the kitchen for just enough time to announce "Ray hit a home run with the wines!" I followed both men into the kitchen for a last-minute review of the menu.

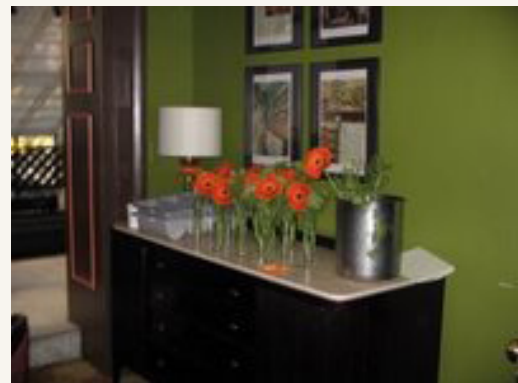
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Spread before us on the chopping block were:

- Poulet Noir Ravioli with Chocolate Carbonara & Prosciutto di Parma
- Sequoia Grove Chardonnay 2005
- Seared Foie Gras with Cocoa Nibs, Chocolate Brioche, and Onion-Fennel Jam
- Champagne Taittinger Brut La Française NV
- Peppered Beef Tenderloin with Port, Shallots, and Chocolate Jus
- Wild Oak by St. Francis Old Vines Zinfandel 2005
- Baby Spinach with Smoked Lardons, Gorgonzola, Hazelnuts, & Cocoa Rouge Vinaigrette
- Salviano Orvieto Classico 2005



Ray told me that he leans toward "tart, bright, unoaked" Chardonnays, but the heavier wine he selected was a better match for the pasta sauce in the brunch's first course. I took a bite, then a sip. Giddy from the ravioli's rich flavors and the most buoyant, least cloying, oaky Chardonnay I've ever tasted, I lunged toward the foie gras. But when a grandmotherly lady appeared out of nowhere, I stepped back and composed myself. She was food writer emerita Anna Teresa Callen, and she'd arrived to introduce Drew and Ray to the crowd that was beginning to file in. She pointed out that I was wearing an antique Roman cameo just like hers before she slipped into a saucy conversation with Ray about tiramisu, semifreddo, and Florence Fabricant. I could have listened to her talk all day, but I had a date to meet my own grandmother for brunch uptown. I walked quietly out of the kitchen, then out the door, leaving the foie gras untouched.



Drew told me later that he uses Hudson Valley Foie Gras and caramelized cacao nibs from Paris Gourmet. I entertained the fantasy of recreating the dish for Thanksgiving, but my family dinner starts in two hours and I still have to put the finishing touches on my Winter Squash Soup with Pie Spices (a recipe I tore from the pages of Food & Wine a few years ago). I'll have to wait until I'm in Providence, where Drew has promised to teach me the recipe in person. I'll bring the flowers.