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Garrison Confections

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Born and raised in Huntsville, Alabama, educated at the Culinary Institute of America, and dedicated to using only high-quality American-produced chocolate, Andrew Shotts redefines the field of artisan chocolate and raises the bar for confection making in the United States. In the fall of 2001, Andrew and his wife Tina Wright opened [Garrison Confections](#). Grounded in his American roots, and informed by his classical European training, Andrew forges a new path in chocolate making that respects time-tested tradition while recognizing the virtues of America's seasonal flavors and creative innovation.

CZ: You are a renowned pastry chef, with an impressive background and several awards. What made you choose chocolate making over pastry?

Andrew Shotts: I switched from being a pastry chef to chocolate because being a chocolatier opens up a special niche market where I can make and sell products, and also open a shop. I could have opened a pastry shop at some point but it would have been very expensive. So I guess it's been a lot easier for me to focus all my energy into one product, which is chocolate. Because when you are a pastry chef you have to offer all kinds of products like croissants, breads, petit fours, chocolates; it's a lot of work and I'm only one guy.

CZ: Did your training overseas change your optic on the knowledge you have assessed in school? Are European practices way different than American ones?

Andrew Shotts: Yes, I've been to France three or four times, and each time I've spent there four to six weeks there. And I've worked for free, from four in the morning to five in the afternoon. I've also worked in Italy for an entire year, for free. But it was very helpful. I wouldn't give that for the world. These days you say something to someone about working for free and they laugh at you. But I was 21 back then, it was a good age to do that.

CZ: When did you open the chocolate shop?

Andrew Shotts: We incorporated in 2001, but started making chocolates and whole selling in 2002 in spring. We initially open the Chocolate Loft on 23rd Street and 6th Avenue, and we've been there for two years. Afterwards we moved to Providence, Rhode Island, to open Garrison Confections. There we have a kitchen that's four times the size of the one we

had in NYC, and we also have a retail shop there.

CZ: Why didn't you open Garrison Confections in New York?

Andrew Shotts: The price of the rent, and the real estate was too expensive in New York, plus that I personally wanted to leave New York. Now we have a 7900 sq. foot kitchen and a 600 sq. foot retail store. We're also distributing our products all over US, and we're looking into the international distribution too.

CZ: How many flavors do you currently offer?

Andrew Shotts: We have 12 flavors that change 4 times a year, they are seasonal. And we also have an additional 20 flavors that we keep on hand year-round. We're also having some specials for the holidays and Valentine's day. We have a special line for Brook Brothers, and we create another 4 lines of 6 different flavors each for another client. So if you'd walk into my factory now, you can see 40 different types of bonbons basically. We're offering to our clients a list of all the flavors I've done since 2002, and they get to choose what they want.

CZ: Where can New Yorkers find your chocolates?

Andrew Shotts: As I said, Brook Brothers distributes a special line that I created just for them, and then there's also the Chocolate Bar which has probably 18 of my chocolates, plus candies and confections, tablets, bars, and candy bars. They also carry our hot chocolate—we have a regular flavor and a spicy one.

CZ: Which are your best sellers?

Andrew Shotts: Our number one seller is the salted caramel. And then, one of the reason I believe I was successful is that our products are seasonal; I change the flavors as often as possible. This summer's specials are the Creamsicle, then we have a Key Lime, Spicy Mango, Rhubarb Pie, Mint Julep, Lychee, a Strawberry Rose, different types of fruits with lots of acid and citrus.

CZ: What future plans do you have?

Andrew Shotts: Next year we're planning on running a line of filled chocolate tablets, and a line of fresh pastries, and also a line of ice creams. I wanted to launch the ice cream line a while ago, but our shop wasn't logistically set up for that. So I didn't want to launch a product until I know it's going to be no problems whatsoever maintaining the quality and integrity. We're going to open a café as well, so when we'll have the fresh pastry, people will have a nice place to sit and eat. And in January 2007 will be launched my first book called "Making Artisan Chocolates." People will be able to find advance copies at the Chocolate Show in November.