

SOUTHERN MAKERS: JARDÍ CHOCOLATES

The Unlikely Confectioner

By Kate Williams // Photos by Shelby Gordon



The first thing you need to know about Jocelyn Gragg is that she can't speak more than a sentence or two without a laugh, or at least a giggle. Even sitting amid a gargantuan holiday order from the Atlanta Botanical Garden for thousands of s'more kits featuring her delicate homemade marshmallows, she maintains a sense of humor.

She laughs when she explains that she's burned out three KitchenAid mixers coating candied macadamia nuts with white chocolate in a jerry-rigged tumbler. She laughs, somewhat maniacally, when she talks about the rising popularity of matcha and how that'll allow her to market her green tea truffles again. And she still laughs when she details the challenges of making chocolates her way—without artificial colors or flavors, by hand, almost entirely by herself.

Named for the Catalan word for garden, Gragg's chocolate company, Jardí, is based in an unassuming production facility in the Atlanta suburb of Chamblee. She founded it in 2015



with her husband, Jacob Gragg, who helps out with farmers markets and deliveries and serves as her primary sounding board for new flavors.

The two met when they were working at the Georgian Room on Sea Island, she as a pastry chef and he as the beverage director. This job

From left: Jardí owner Jocelyn Gragg with a twelve-piece sampler; Gragg fills truffles; each piece is handpainted or airbrushed.

was Gragg's first out of culinary school; she studied baking and pastry arts at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York.

IN THE FIELD

before moving to the Georgia coast.

She didn't, however, intend to make a career selling sweets. Gragg always wanted to be a chef and "do savory stuff." Even to this day, she says that she dislikes sweets and hates baking. But when she started culinary school, she didn't think she'd make it through the butchery and fish courses, so she landed in the pastry department. And chocolate, it turned out, kept her away from hacksaws and still let her explore innovative flavor combinations.

Eventually Gragg and her husband moved to Atlanta and, after burning out on restaurant work, explored what they'd do next. A bakery was out of the question; but chocolate on its own, she said, could fill a niche in the city.

Jardí Chocolates is what is known as a confectionary. Gragg does not make the actual chocolate herself—she sources from the French company Valrhona and Atlanta-based



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Xocolatl. Instead, she transforms it into truffles, chocolate-covered nuts, and elaborately filled candy bars. Everything but the nuts is hand-painted or airbrushed using plant-based dyes in a corner of her shop that's splattered with paint. Gragg says that she struggles with the designs, but it's impossible to tell; each chocolate is bright and whimsical, like sugar-filled reproductions of deep-space satellite images.

But her flavors—imagine everything from hazelnut crunch and whiskey pecan to raspberry-rose-pistachio and hibiscus lemonade—are where Gragg really stands out. She gets her inspiration from dining out, traveling, and wandering farmers markets. “One of my flavors

came from a trip to Israel, [where] I fell in love with halvah and sesame seed.” She took black sesame seeds and pureed them with glucose syrup to create a chewy candy with the texture and the consistency of a Tootsie Roll; today you'll find it paired with white sesame-white chocolate ganache and raspberry jam in a dark chocolate shell.

Regardless of the ingredients, Gragg is insistent that each confection be properly seasoned. “Salt is something that should always be used,” she says. “We don't have something called ‘salted caramel,’ but our caramel is seasoned. It doesn't need to be stated.”

“True to form, her Valentine's Day chocolates are a bit, well, salty. She's calling the collection “Silly Love Songs,” with each confection named for a love ballad. It'll include Bleeding Love, a white chocolate confection filled with red cocoa butter-dyed blood orange caramel; Your Song, a candy bar filled with strawberry jam, milk chocolate ganache and vanilla caramel; and Forever Love, a cherry cordial with a liquid center.

Beyond crafting holiday candies, part of Gragg's intention in starting Jardí was to provide a service to restaurants. “It is so hard to do chocolate well unless you have a very specific environment,” she says. “And its hot and steamy in a kitchen. It's always got drafts. One stray breeze can screw up sugar work or anything with gold leaf. You breathe wrong and it's on the ceiling.” So Gragg shops her chocolates around to fine Atlanta restaurants, such as Atlas in Buckhead, as well as high-end catering companies. And she does special orders—constantly.

These orders include weddings, those s'mores kits, and even special projects like camouflage-styled chocolates for an events company in Parsons, Tennessee. Anyone can request custom chocolates, or order from Jardí's regular lineup online; she ships throughout the United States

and Canada. Her chocolates also sell through a couple of retailers in Atlanta, as well as one in San Francisco, but currently Gragg has no plans to expand to her own retail space. She'd need to move—there's no foot traffic in her area of Chamblee—and having to keep specific inventory on hand wouldn't allow her to take on special projects like those hand-painted camouflage chocolates.

ANATOMY OF AN AWARD-WINNING CONFECTION

Gragg has taken home accolades for both the flavor and design of her chocolate bars and truffles, but her most recent honor is a 2019 Good Food Award for her raspberry macadamia nuts. (The Good Food Awards honor excellence in sustainable food production across a wide array of categories, from confections to olive oils.)

Jardí's winning macadamia nuts are roasted, then candied. Next, they take a trip in a tumbler to get coated in white chocolate and dehydrated raspberries. “It's like a reverse rock sander because it adds texture instead of taking it away,” says Gragg. A little dusting of gold leaf gives them extra shine.

Each nut is not terribly sweet for being enveloped in white chocolate; the raspberry powder balances out the sugar, and the deeply toasted nuts add depth and complexity. Given their vibrant pink color, they're an excellent addition to Jardí's Valentine's Day collection.