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# Business Expansion Plan

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APRIL 2024	<a href="http://www.cocovaa.com">www.cocovaa.com</a>	<a href="mailto:INFO@COCOVAA.COM">INFO@COCOVAA.COM</a>
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## Executive Summary

CocoVaa Chocolatier has carved out a distinct niche in the premium chocolate market by blending high-quality, naturally sourced ingredients with a strong commitment to environmental and social responsibility. By focusing on unique flavor profiles and fine craftsmanship, and by targeting adults looking for an affordable luxury, CocoVaa is well-positioned to appeal to consumers who value both quality and ethical production practices. Our approach not only enhances the brand's allure but also contributes to a broader positive impact on the global community and environment which consumers are demanding more and more.



## About Us

CocoVaa Chocolatier's journey from a local boutique to a globally recognized brand under the leadership of Syovata Edari is quite remarkable. Transitioning from a trial lawyer to a master chocolatier, Edari has infused her passion into creating a brand that not only wins awards but also wins hearts, as evidenced by CocoVaa's numerous accolades from the Academy of Chocolate Awards and the recent James Beard Award nomination.

The challenges faced by CocoVaa, particularly in scaling up to meet demand, are typical for successful boutique enterprises transitioning to larger scale operations. The plans to expand production capacity and develop a wholesale division are strategic moves that will help address the availability issues and capitalize on the growing demand for premium, ethically produced chocolate. This expansion will not only potentially increase CocoVaa's market share but also strengthen its presence both nationally and internationally, fulfilling the brand's promise and Edari's vision of making CocoVaa a household name in fine chocolates.

### Two Madison chefs and one Madison restaurant named James Beard Award semifinalists

Sean Pharr of Mint Mark is recognized for a second time, while a local chocolatier and a local restaurant and meal kit service make the list for the first time.

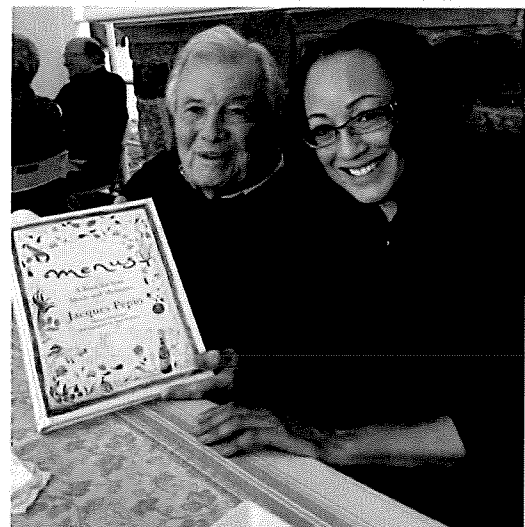
By Madison Magazine Staff | Jan 24, 2024



Photos by Elna Chua, Nick Hansen, Sonya Hantz

### Madison's CocoVaa honored as 2024 James Beard Award semifinalist

By David Dahmer · Jan 25, 2024 · 0



Syovata Edari, owner of CocoVaa, with legendary French chef, author and television personality Jacques Pépin

The trajectory of CocoVaa from a home-based venture to a globally recognized highly decorated chocolate brand illustrates a compelling growth story, and one that's only limited by space. Seeking a \$1 million loan to purchase and build out a new property is a significant step that reflects both the successes CocoVaa has already achieved and its potential for future expansion.

This move to secure a larger, owned facility will address the company's production limitations and better meet the increasing consumer demand - both locally and nationally. Owning a property also provides more control over the production environment, which is crucial for maintaining the high quality and uniqueness of our products. Moreover, having a dedicated space could allow for greater experimentation with new product lines and more efficient operations.

CocoVaa's consistent revenue growth, brand recognition, and award-winning status are key indicators of the brand's viability and the soundness of our investment. Furthermore, the strategic use of the loan for property acquisition not only addresses immediate operational needs but also enhances the company's asset base, making it an even more attractive investment proposition.

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## About the Founder



Having previously litigated high-stakes criminal cases in federal courts across the U.S., I returned to Wisconsin to establish my own law firm. Criminal defense was my sole expertise and means of livelihood. Yet, I harbored a growing dissatisfaction with the legal profession, despite never imagining a career outside of law, let alone as a professional chocolatier—my two-decade-long kitchen hobby.

A transformative 2016 trip to France, while juggling my full-time law practice and responsibilities as a single mother, allowed me to pursue a master chocolatier course at Valrhona. This experience fueled a surprising career shift that baffled many: why abandon a legal career for the culinary arts?

Upon returning from France with a collection of recipes that would birth numerous award-winning chocolates, I founded CocoVaa Chocolatier. Initially, I sold my chocolates from my briefcase in court to drum up referrals for my law practice. However, their rising popularity gradually overshadowed my legal work. Starting from my home kitchen, progressing to a small factory in a communal space, and eventually establishing a brick-and-mortar store, our growth has been deliberate and intentional. Now poised for a significant expansion, CocoVaa Chocolatier has surmounted numerous challenges, growing with the meticulous care we infuse into each chocolate creation. I am immensely proud of our achievements and eagerly anticipate our future as we expand further.

*Syonara Edari*

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# Mission

CocoVaa is more than just a chocolatier; we seek to raise a community of passionate artisans committed to excellence, ethics, and education through chocolate. Our journey of growth is propelled by our dedication to our principles, ensuring that as our scale increases, so does our positive impact on the world and on the palates of chocolate lovers everywhere.

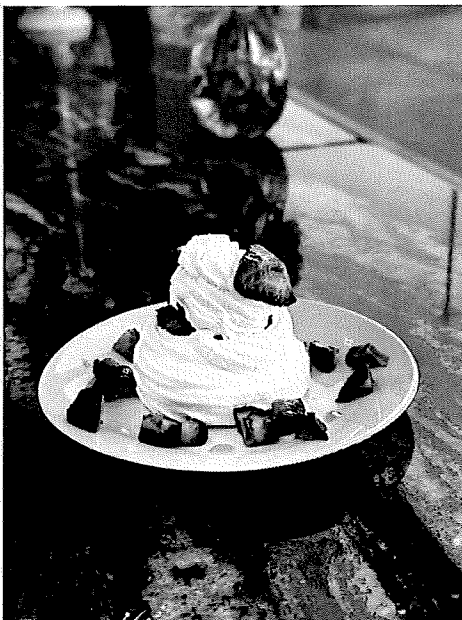
## Core Commitments:

*Ethical Sourcing:* We prioritize the use of ethically sourced cacao and other natural ingredients, ensuring that our supply chain supports sustainable farming practices and fair conditions for workers.

*Craftsmanship Excellence:* Each piece of chocolate is meticulously crafted to meet the highest standards of quality and taste. Our process combines traditional techniques with innovative flavors, reflecting both the history and evolution of chocolate making.

*Sustainability:* We are dedicated to advancing sustainability within the chocolate industry. This includes minimizing environmental impact and fostering economic stability among the communities from which we source our ingredients.

*Cultural Bridging:* Through our chocolates, we aim to promote a greater understanding of world cultures. Our products serve as a delicious gateway to the stories, traditions, and people behind the flavors.



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# Company Ownership

CocoVaa LLC operates as a privately held corporation, structured as a Limited Liability Company (LLC) in the United States. The company is entirely owned by Syovata K. Edari, who also holds a registered trademark for the CocoVaa brand under the United States Patent and Trademark Office, ensuring its exclusive use in commerce.

## **Confidentiality and Transparency:**

Further details related to the trademark litigation and other sensitive aspects of CocoVaa's operations are available under strict confidentiality agreements. This policy ensures that while CocoVaa LLC is committed to transparency, it also prioritizes the security of its proprietary and legal information.



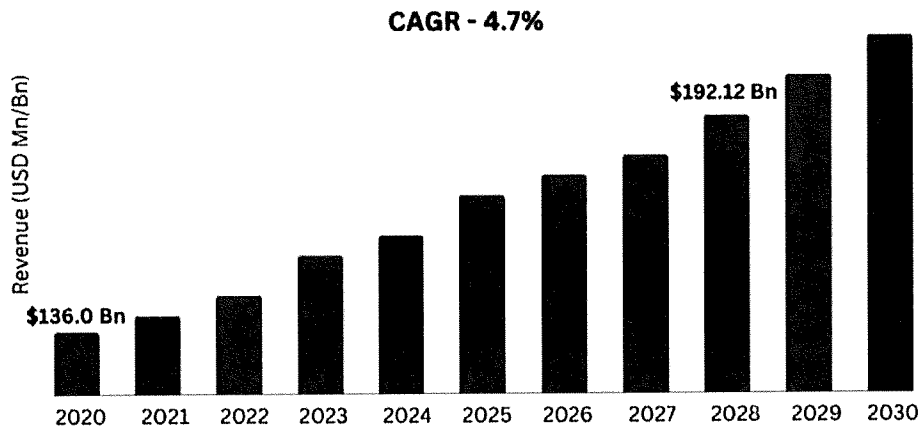
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# Market Analysis

- Size of Market: Estimated at \$150B global annually.
- Gap: Limited options that combine exceptional quality, ethics with affordability.
- Premium Chocolate v. Industrial Chocolate: According to National Confectioners Association, the sales of premium ranges increased by almost 13% as compared to the previous year since the COVID pandemic. Grocery sales among all distribution channels increased by almost 21.4%.
- The rising concern among consumers regarding the intake of healthy foods has surged the growth of the premium chocolate market during the pandemic and as consumers become more educated about health and wellness.



Global Chocolate Market Size - 2030



Source: zionmarketresearch.com

## Key Statistics (FCIA; damecacao.com)

**59%**

of US candy sales are  
chocolate

**40%**

of consumers shop  
online

**57%**

of chocolate consumers  
prefer ethical sourcing

**3**

Number of chocolate bars  
consumed by average  
American per week

**23%**

increase in  
premium chocolate  
sales in 2021

**90%**

of Americans plan to gift  
chocolate for Christmas

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## Local Market Opportunity

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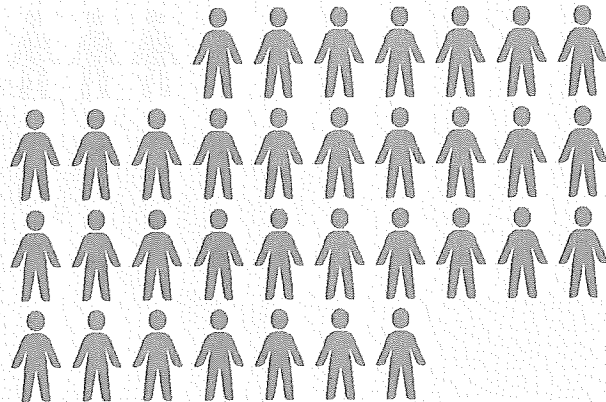
## Competative Advantage

CocoVaa stands out nationally as the first Academy award winning chocolatier in Wisconsin, the only chocolatier in Wisconsin to ever be nominated for a James Beard Award, and one of only a small handful of American nationals to ever make the Roll of Honour Board in the AoC. CocoVaa's values conform to the growing demand for premium chocolate and flavors that speak to a growing global audience. CocoVaa has a growing and engaged consumer base that increased tremendously throughout the COVID pandemic. CocoVaa has a 4.9 rating on google and continues to gain positive feedback from new and existing customers. The biggest complaint is that CocoVaa is not more widely available which is what we want to change by expanding production.

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## Target Market

- Increasing number of consumers prioritizing quality, authenticity, unique flavor profiles and ethics.
- Online shoppers
- Gift shoppers
- Local shoppers
- People seeking an affordable luxury



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## Achievements

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# Challenges: Surviving a Global Pandemic While Outgrowing Our Space

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# How Our Pandemic Pivots Are Paying Off

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# Challenges Beyond the Pandemic

CocoVaa Chocolatier's current operational challenges stem from its rapid growth and increasing demand, which its existing infrastructure struggles to accommodate. Addressing these challenges is crucial for sustaining growth and maintaining the quality and service that CocoVaa is known for. Here are the key issues and potential solutions:

## **Production Capacity vs. Demand:**

- Challenge: Current production levels cannot meet rising consumer demand due to space and equipment limitations.
- Solution: Seek investment for expanding or relocating to a larger facility that can accommodate more advanced production lines and increased storage capacity.

## **Inadequate Facility for Climate Control:**

- Challenge: The existing facility cannot effectively manage climate fluctuations, impacting production, especially during warmer months.
- Solution: Upgrade HVAC and climate control systems to maintain optimal production conditions year-round or relocate to a facility designed to handle such environmental needs.

## **Constraints Impacting Operational Efficiency:**

- Challenge: Limited storage, shipping, and packaging areas are throttling potential revenue streams and operational efficiency.
- Solution: Redesign the layout to optimize space usage or expand the current footprint to facilitate smoother operations in shipping and packaging.

## **Limited Operating Hours:**

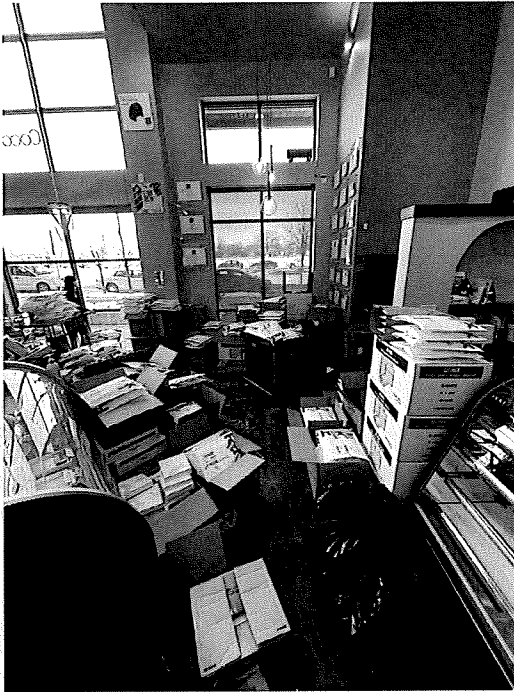
- Challenge: CocoVaa is open only 2 days per week for 12 hours total, limiting sales opportunities and customer access. The reason for this is due to space - specifically, multiple functions cannot exist at the same time. So when we ship we cant manufacture or run retail.
- Solution: Expand operational hours by hiring additional staff and in creasing space to support all sales channels effectively.

## **Workforce Recruitment and Training Challenges:**

- Challenge: The confined space hinders the ability to recruit and train a skilled workforce.
- Solution: Expanded manufacturing space to provide adequate training facilities and a conducive work environment to attract skilled workers.

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## Challenges, cont.



### Operational Highlights:

#### Capability:

- Successfully fulfilled a large order of 1,600 16-piece chocolate boxes, demonstrating CocoVaa's ability to handle significant wholesale orders.
- Timing and Resource Allocation: The order was completed in a tight timeframe of three weeks during late January to early February, showcasing the team's efficiency and commitment.

#### Challenges Encountered:

- Impact on Retail Operations: Fulfilling the large order required dedicating substantial resources that resulted in the temporary closure of retail operations during a peak sales period, just before Valentine's Day.
- Production Limitations: The need to use the kitchen space as an extension of the packaging line limited the ability to produce other products concurrently, particularly affecting Valentine's Day specific production.

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## Challenges, cont.

The current facility layout and operational infrastructure present significant challenges for CocoVaa Chocolatier, hindering both production efficiency and growth potential. Here's a detailed analysis of the existing setup:

### Current Facility Breakdown

Production Area: 500 sq ft  
Cooling Room: 300 sq ft  
Retail Space: 500 sq ft  
Storage: 100 sq ft  
Loading and Dispatch: None  
Packaging Area: None  
Loading Zone: None  
Storage for Finished Products: None  
Dry Storage for Packaging: Rented offsite  
Administrative Area: None  
Quality Control Lab: None  
Parking: Unenforced  
Retail Location: Poor, not walkable  
Management: Poorly managed





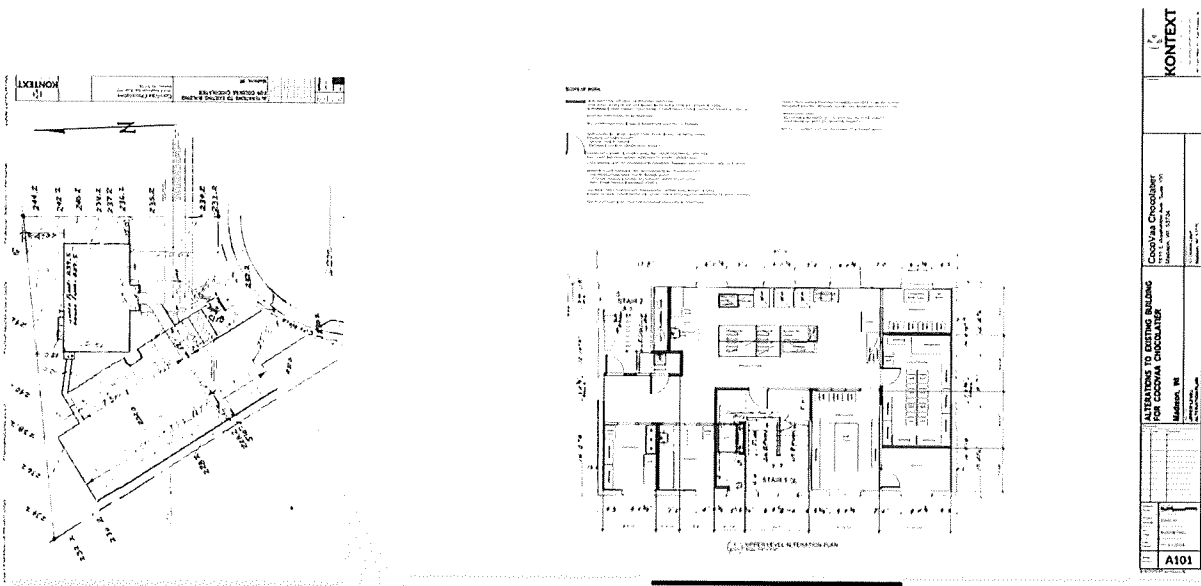
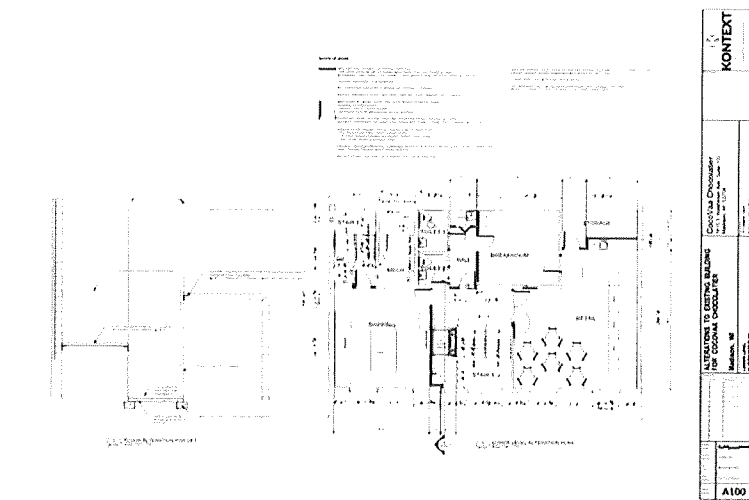
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## Solution: Expanded Space

- **Increased Production Capacity:** As demand for our chocolates grows, so does the necessity to produce more products. Without adequate space, we risk stalling our production lines, leading to potential shortages and lost sales.
- **Better Storage Solutions:** Chocolate, being sensitive to temperature and humidity, requires specific storage conditions. An expanded space would allow for more significant and sophisticated storage solutions, ensuring the freshness and quality of our products are preserved.
- **Streamlining Operations:** With more room, machinery can be placed optimally, storage can be organized better, and workers can move around without hindrance. This operational efficiency can lead to faster production times, reduced waste, and ultimately higher profitability.
- **Room for Growth and Scaling:** Thinking ahead, the expansion isn't just about the present. It's also about preparing for the future. A larger facility gives us the leverage to scale our operations as the company grows, without constantly having to relocate or make significant alterations.
- **New Product Lines:** With added space, our company has the flexibility to innovate and introduce new products. Expanding our product line can tap into new market segments and diversify our customer base, ensuring stability in sales even if one product faces a dip in demand.
- **Enhancing Customer Experience:** For companies that offer tours or have on-site stores, a spacious and well-organized facility can significantly enhance the customer experience. It offers a more in-depth insight into the chocolate-making process, fosters trust, and can be a unique selling proposition in itself.
- **Enhancing Quality Control:** Expanded space provides room for dedicated quality control areas, ensuring each product that leaves our facility meets the high standards our customers have come to expect.
- **Employee Well-being:** A spacious working environment is essential for the well-being and productivity of employees. Cramped spaces can lead to stress, inefficiency, and even potential workplace hazards.

# Proposed Space

- We have an accepted offer on a building that will increase our production capacity by at least 400%
- Shipping fulfillment: 500 square feet
- Production: 2100 sq ft
- Packaging area (includes storage for packaging) 500 sq ft
- Cold storage (includes space to store packaged goods): 300 sq ft
- Retail: 600 sq ft
- Breakroom: 300
- Total: 4300 sq ft
- COST: 275/sq ft. Estimated for purchase and buildout



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## Financing Request and Terms

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## Current Revenue and Projections

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# Summary of Operating Costs and Projections in New Facility

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## Revenue Projections and Operating Profits

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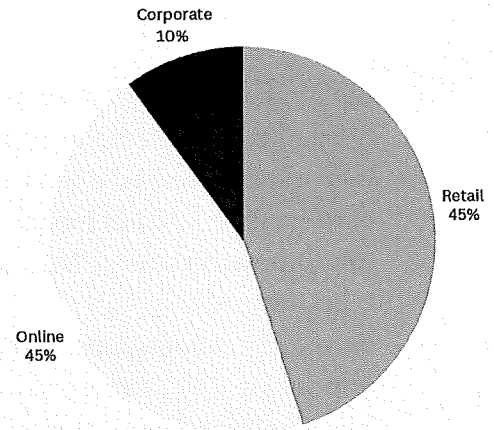
## Revenue Projections and Operating Profits cont.

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## Current Sales Channels

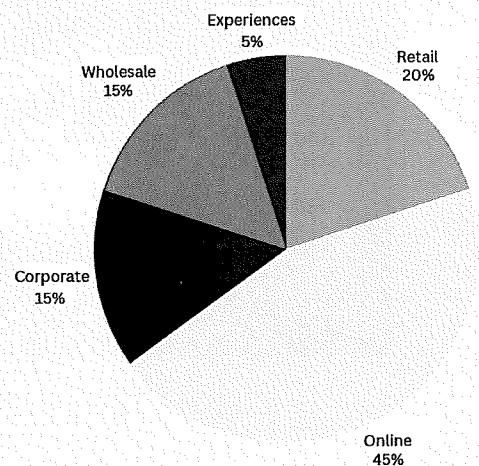
- Retail - 45%
- Online - 45%
- Corporate - 10%
- Wholesale - 0%
- Events/Experiences - 0%



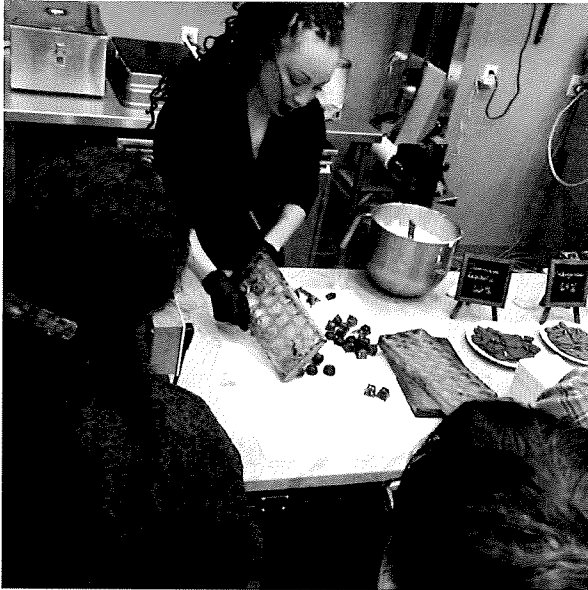
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## Additional Sales Channels Supported by Expanded Space

- Retail - 20%
- Online - 45%
- Corporate - 15%
- Wholesale - 15%
- Events/Experiences - 5%



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- Online shopping now accounts for 40% of consumer behavior. In 2021 CocoVaa saw a significant increase in online sales consistent with the national trend.
  - Increased capacity opens up wholesale opportunities. We've been in conversations with Pavilion (Alberston's), Saint Aymes (London based), Metcalf's, Sorel Liqueur who are interested in either carrying our products or contracting with us as a co-manufacturer.
  - Space for events/classes/experiences opens up another stream of revenue and is important for marketing. We stopped holding events in 2020 because of the pandemic and our space limitations, but there's been consistent interest in classes and events.



Tasting Tours in 2019



Classes in 2017

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## Product Offerings

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CocoVaa offers a wide range of bars, barks, bonbons, caramel sauces, dipped fruits and even cakes and cookies. However we are most known for our boxed bonbons which have won dozens of international awards.

Our expansion plan includes increased production of products that are easy to scale, don't require the level of skill that the bonbons require, and that have margins that will make developing wholesale lines more feasible/profitable.

Bonbons	Bonbons or filled chocolates are our biggest seller and what we are most known for.
Bars	We offer an array of infused chocolate bars that have grown in popularity over the years.
Barks	Chocolate bark is a must have for any chocolate shop with a retail presence. Barks have among the highest profit margins.
Panned	Chocolate covered centers like nuts, fruit, coffee beans etc., have long shelf lives and are easily scalable.

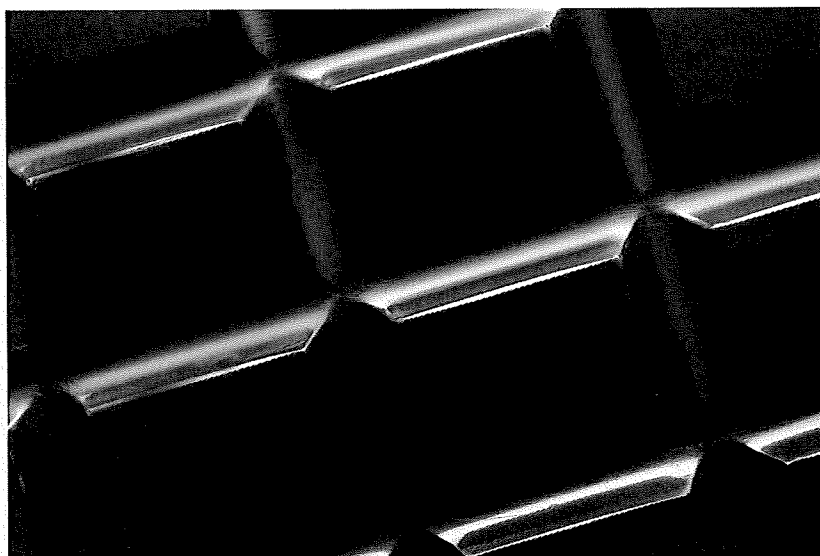


Bonbons

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Chocolate Bars

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## Chocolate Barks

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## Panned Products

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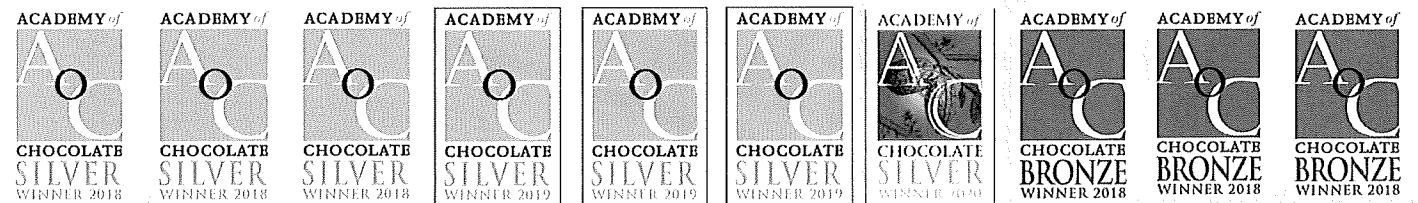
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# Appendix

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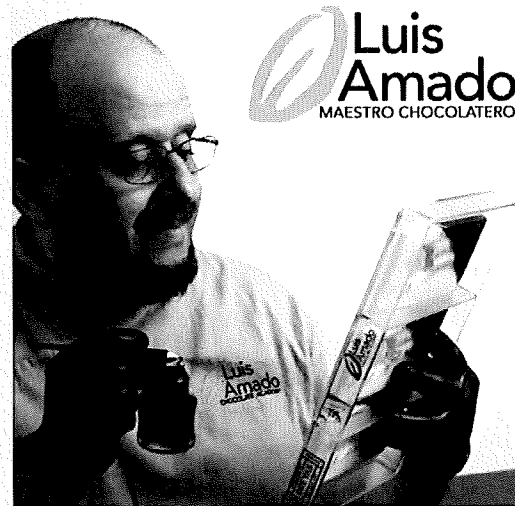
# Inventory List

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"I've trained some of the best, including pastry chefs in France to compete for the MOF title. In my career which is long, I have met few chefs who can master technique, presentation AND flavor. Edari is one of them. Her work is marvelous. I recently tested one of her collections and it was confirmed to me why she has received so many international awards."

***Master Chocolatier Luis Amado***



"WONDERFUL!

Hello Syovata:

My father Jacques

Pepin and I were

recently gifted your

chocolates by Scott

MacGregor and they

were absolutely

delicious! Thank you! I

Hope to be able to

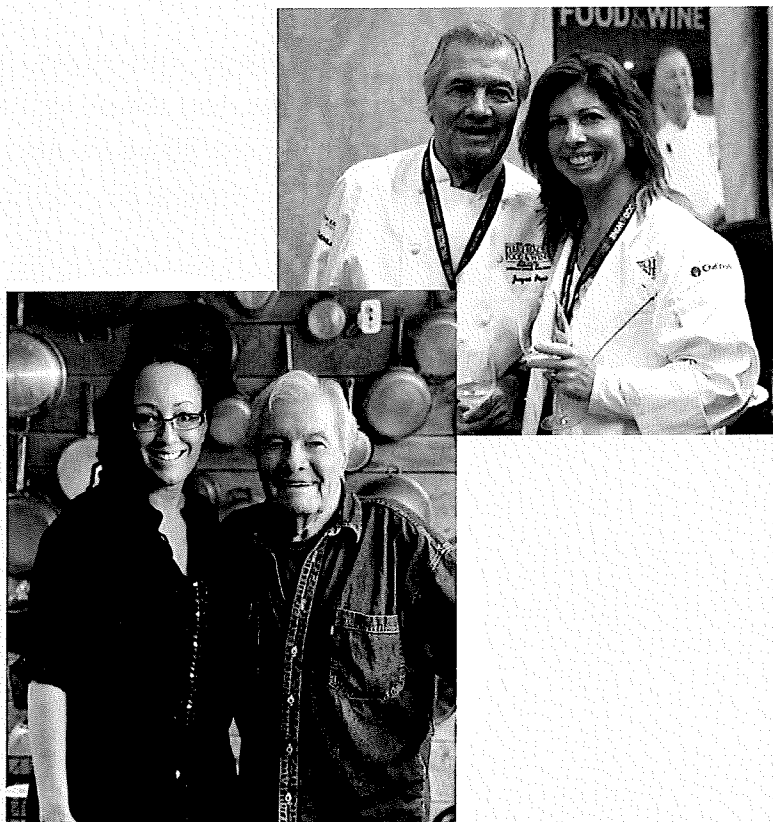
order more.

Congratulations on a

wonderful and delicious

adventure!

***Kindly- Claudine"***



I've watched CocoVaa grow a loyal following since its beginnings in 2016. Vata is a highly skilled chocolatier who understands the fine balance between couvertures, flavorings and various ingredients that present a great tasting praline or truffle. The love Vata puts in her product not only results in a great tasting indulgence but has a unique flair of artistry. Vata is also extremely committed to giving back to the disenfranchised of her community.



Philippe Tytgat, Vice President of  
Sales for North America at  
Blommer Chocolates

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"There is top, average and sucks. You're in the top! I don't say that too often as I have been in the industry for almost 50 years now! So take the compliment as a milestone. Seriously, you're world class!."

***Paul Edward, owner/founder of Chef Rubber***

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Maria Shriver is gifted  
CocoVaa for Mother's Day  
2022.

Wow, this @cocovaa  
chocolate looks delicious!

11 November 2022

Ms Vata Edari  
Founder/Director  
Cocovaa Chocolatier  
1815 East Washington Avenue  
Madison, WI 53704  
USA

Dear Ms Vata Edari

**LETTER OF APPRECIATION**

On behalf of Their Majesties, The Olori and Yeyeluwa Olori of Eti-Oni, Friends of Eti-Oni and members of International Cocoa Diplomacy, I will like to acknowledge and express our sincere gratitude and appreciation for your presence and participation as one of our special guests and speaker at the 2022 edition of Royal Cocoa Soiree of Arts and Culture held on Thursday 27 October 2022 at the Royal Over-Seas League House, Six Park Place, St James's, London SW1A 1LR.

Without your presence and contributions, our testimony of the huge success of the event will be incomplete and for this, we are grateful and say a big "Thank You" for your believe in our cause which was displayed in your support of our message of the need to bridge the gap between cocoa producing regions and chocolate consumption nations to achieve shared value towards wealth creation that can transform cocoa communities across the globe. I must also mention your thoughtful act of sharing your experiences and challenges in the highly competitive space of commercial chocolate making and ideas of how to overcome them which forms part of the mission of International Cocoa Diplomacy.

We will continue to update you as we move ahead working to achieve our vision of building that bridge between cocoa production and consumption through true friendship and partnership and trust with it, the world will be a better place and look forward to you joining us at Eti-Oni for the annual editions of The Cocoa Festival.

Finally, we will like to seize this opportunity to remind you as Oba Dokun Thompson said during his remarks, that the inaugural edition of the International Chocolate Festival London will take place between Wednesday 18 Oct to Sunday 22 Oct, 2023 to celebrate chocolate

28 FOUNES DRIVE  
CHAFFORD HUNDRED, GRAYS  
ESSEX RM16 6DU  
Tel: +447956614224, Email: foed@cocoafestival.org  
www.cocoafestival.org

from, as well as the culture of, cocoa producing regions in a manner that will bring cocoa closer to chocolate consumers for value proposition and trust you and your team will participate and take a prominent role in this history making event.  
Please be assured of my esteemed regards always and as the year 2022 slowly comes to a close, we want to wish you in advance, a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year 2023.

Yours sincerely,

For: FRIENDS OF ETI-ONI

YEMISI JENKINS MBE  
Global Coordinator

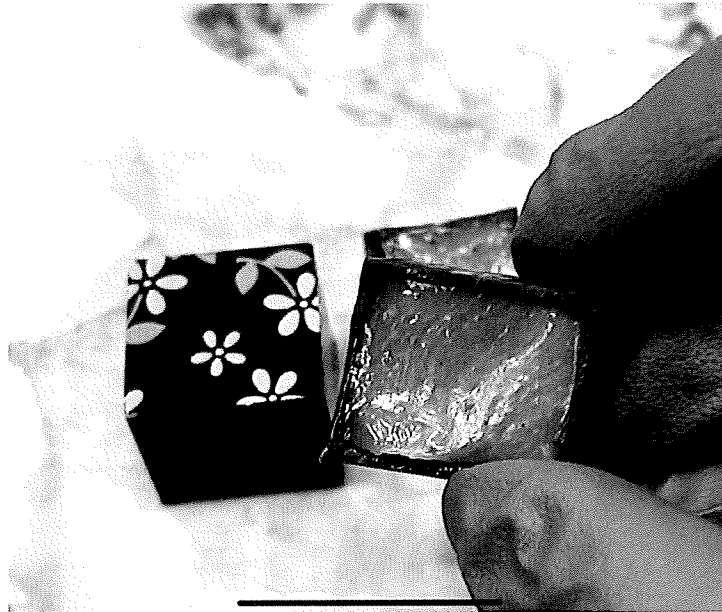


# Chocolatier Syovata Edari Coming to Madison Beach Hotel

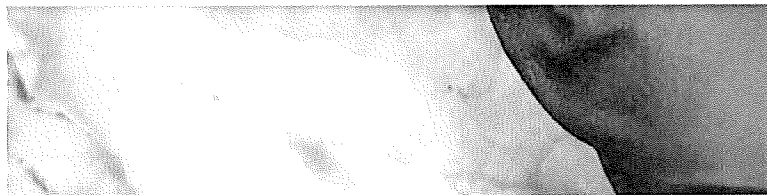
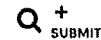
BY PEM MCNERNEY • 08/11/2023 05:45 PM EST • 08/14/2023 11:45 AM EST



1 of 1



TUESDAY, AUGUST 29, 2023



CocoVaa Chocolatier's strawberry basil caramel, chocolate-covered infused caramelized strawberry purée. *Photo courtesy of CocoVaa*

International award-winning chocolatier Syovata Edari the owner of CocoVaa Chocolatier in Madison, Wisconsin, will be featured at an Epicurean Dinner on Sept. 29 at 7 p.m. along with a guided chocolate and wine tasting event on Sept. 30 at 2 p.m. at Madison Beach Hotel's The Wharf, 94 West Wharf Road, Madison. Edari, the founder of CocoVaa Chocolatier, is known for handcrafted chocolates and unique flavor combinations. She will collaborate with The Wharf's Executive Chef Brian Warmingham to create a menu infused with chocolate, including passed hors d'oeuvres and a multi-course plated dinner featuring, of course, a chocolate dessert. Find out more or buy tickets by visiting <https://www.eventbrite.com/>.

Email Pem McNerney at [p.mcnerney@shorepublishing.com](mailto:p.mcnerney@shorepublishing.com)


ACADEMY OF CHOCOLATE AWARDS

US chocolatier named as judge in this year's Academy of Chocolate awards

By Anthony Myers

24 Jan 2020 - Last updated on 24 Jan 2020 at 13:39 GMT

SHARE



Who will win this year's Golden Bean Award? Pic: Academy of Chocolate

RELATED TAGS


Chocolate

World's most prestigious chocolate awards will be held in London, UK, next month, deadline for entries is Friday 31 January. CocoVaa Chocolatier Vata Edari named as one of the judges.

The Academy of Chocolate annual awards take place in London this year over a 16-week period between February and May – with deadline for entries from producers and chocolatiers on Friday 31 January.

One of the judges announced this year is US-based CocoVaa Chocolatier, Vata Edari, a former competitor and recipient of 29 awards in the prestigious international competition for the craft chocolate industry.

Launched in 2005, the Academy of Chocolate awards have gone from strength to strength mirroring the growth of the fine chocolate market. In the first year, there were 12 entries.



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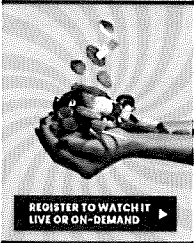
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Sweetest Innovations

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WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 13

8:30 PM CET (PARIS) 1:30 AM CT (CHICAGO)



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One of the judges announced this year is US-based CocoVaa Chocolatier, Vata Edari, a former competitor and recipient of 29 awards in the prestigious international competition for the craft chocolate industry.

Launched in 2005, the Academy of Chocolate awards have gone from strength to strength mirroring the growth of the fine chocolate market. In the first year, there were 12 entries. In 2019, that figure had grown to a record-breaking 1,600 submissions from 45 countries.

"I'm excited to be invited as a judge this year" Edari says, "It's an honour and an opportunity I don't take for granted."

She was speaking to ConfectioneryNews while finalising her Valentine's Day season in her studio in Madison, Wisconsin, before heading to London for the awards.

'International Rising Star'

The lawyer-turned-chocolatier has been included in the Academy of Chocolate Award's Roll of Honour Board as an 'International Rising Star', making her one of only a small handful of US nationals to receive the accolade.

Edari attributes her talent for unique flavour combinations, in part to her diverse background which is primarily Kenyan, but also including Russian, Irish, East Indian and American influences.

She says she hopes her participation as a judge will be a positive contribution to the AoC's legacy of being at the forefront of the artisan chocolate movement.

"Competitions that recognise real talent, high quality as well as ethical sourcing, lift up industries and the people in them who may otherwise have gone overlooked".

Edari says it is something she experienced - referring to the impact the international awards have had on her own company and other newcomers in the fast growing world of fine chocolate.

New sweetener insights to guide product development

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13 SEP 2023 WED

Webinar


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Call for more sustainability regulation to help craft chocolate companies



Pass the Twinkle: Ownership of Hostess may be on the move again

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Confidence builder

"Competing (and winning) has been a great confidence builder and has allowed me to establish networks with other chocolatiers and chocolate makers internationally," she says.

The chocolate entrepreneur is still in the startup phase of what she describes as 'a capital intensive business'. With no outside investors, she has self-financed the growth of her chocolate company, including the construction of its first premises.

In next month's judging sessions, Edari will be judging in the filled chocolate category, which is her area of expertise. She is unsure of the exact rubric that will be used to judge but points out there are common industry standards for determining the quality of a chocolate truffle such as mouth feel, snap and aroma.

Chocolatiers and chocolate makers are able to enter multiple products across five key categories – bars, filled chocolates, drinking chocolate, chocolate spreads and brand awareness – giving them the opportunity to be recognised on a global stage.

With the increase in 'Tree to Bar' submissions, the Academy has expanded this area in 2020 to include separate categories for dark, milk and white bars.


Golden Bean award

More than 100 expert judges will make up the panel, including leading chocolatiers and some of the UK's most prominent food writers and bloggers. Judging sessions take place at Westminster Kingsway College in London and winners will be announced at the Awards Ceremony in July, including the famous Golden Bean award, which recognises the achievement of a producer controlling the entire process from roasting the bean to the finished bar.


Sara Jayne Stanes, chairman, Academy of Chocolate, said: "We are delighted to launch our 12th awards this year. In 2005, I could barely dream that the artisan chocolate world would have flourished and identified so many talented chocolatiers and chocolate makers from across the world.

"In addition, the close relationships of the chocolate makers and the cocoa growers have helped both to understand each other's needs and challenges – resulting in ongoing experimentation and products with complexity and character not previously realised. What will the next 12 years bring?"


Edari says it is something she experienced - referring to the impact the international awards have had on her own company and other newcomers in the fast growing world of fine chocolate.



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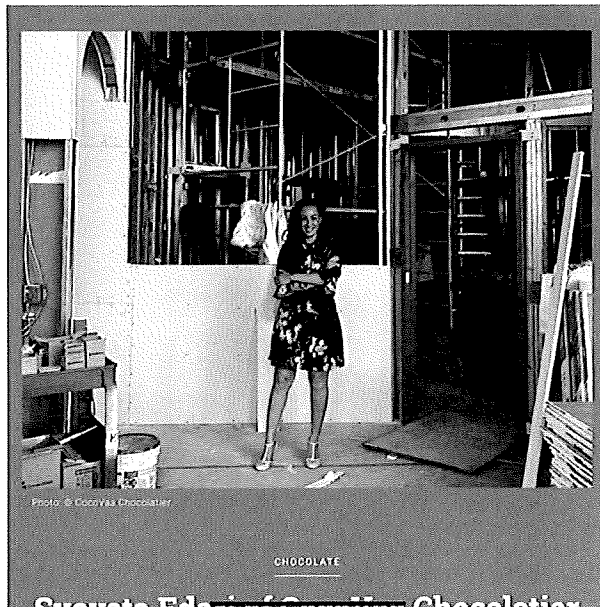


Photo: © CocoVaa Chocolatier

CHOCOLATE

Syovata Edari of CocoVaa Chocolatier

## Syovata Edari of CocoVaa Chocolatier blazes her own trail in chocolate industry

Madison's rock star chocolatier has roots in Milwaukee, and a compelling origin story to boot.



By Lisa Freidrich  
Senior Food Writer, Dining Editor, Podcast Host  
Email: lisa.freidrich@milwaukeejournal.com  
Photography: CocoVaa Chocolatier

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Why this ad?

With Valentine's Day just around the corner, chocolate is on most peoples' minds. That's especially true for CocoVaa Chocolatier, an award-winning Madison-based chocolatier with roots in Milwaukee.

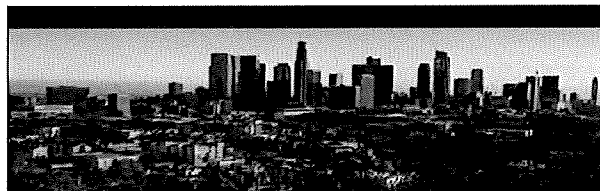
If you walked into the retail space for Madison's CocoVaa Chocolatier a year ago, you'd have seen a chocolate shop unlike any other in Wisconsin.

During daylight hours, light pours into the space at 1815 E. Washington Ave. through windows that extend from the floor to the top of the shop's 20-foot ceiling. The light reflects off of glass jars filled with dark chocolate dipped candied orange and mango.

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CocoVaa Chocolatier

In 2016, master chocolatier Syovata Edari took a huge leap of faith and, as a single mother, left a 15-year career as a trial lawyer to pursue her passion for the chocolate arts. Within a few years she accumulated 30 awards from the London-based Academy of Chocolate. According to veteran chocolatier Luis Amado, "I have trained some of the best in the world. In my career, which is long, I have met few chefs who can master technique, presentation AND flavor. Edari is one of them. Her work is marvelous." Edari has quickly become a leader in her industry with unique flavor profiles which celebrate the diversity of our world and reflect the intensity of her passion. CocoVaa refuses to "stay in the box" with its creations that push the boundaries of flavor and will open you to a new world of possibilities.

www.cocovaa.com

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## SYOVATA EDARI

### SYOVATA EDARI

RELENTLESS IN LAW, AND CHOCOLATE

By Rebecca Anderson Brown, Kate Byst, Lisa Bauer, Shelby Deering, Elle Duncombe-Mills, Jerrie Gao, Emily Leas, Marni McEntee, Candice Wagener & Rachel Werner | Photographed by Hillary Schaeve



Ask Syovata Edari how she became a successful criminal defense lawyer and chocolatier and she'll answer frankly. I do what a lot of people fear—that is to risk failure and embarrassment in pursuit of a dream or what you know is right. "Success" is the journey in pursuit of your passion."

Edari's tenacity is undeniable; as a single mother, she put herself through law school. Later, she overcame tremendous hardship in a profession that's not always welcoming to diversity, serving as

one of only a handful of Wisconsin attorneys of color practicing criminal defense in federal courts. It was during these hard times that Edari took refuge in the kitchen, finding relief in the science of chocolate. It wasn't long before friends and colleagues took notice of her unique flavor profiles—many inspired by her East African, Iranian, Russian and Irish roots—and her part-time hobby became the company Cocolava Chocolatier.

After representing high-profile Madison cases like those of Anthony Linon and Geneke Laird, Edari's move from law into uncharted career territory might surprise some. Yet her passion for the chocolate arts is undeniable, and, as Edari admits, she's a "rule changer/ground breaker" type of person. Coming from a long line of intellectuals and social activists, she explains: "We don't give up. When someone says 'you can't do that,' we ask, 'why not?'"

*Elle Duncombe-Mills*

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### More cocoa, less court

Lawyer moves closer to becoming a full-time chocolatier

BY STEVEN POTTER

AUGUST 24, 2016

RSS



For Edari, chocolate means freedom from the old boys' club.

The main ingredients in Syovata Edari's life are her kids, court and chocolate.

But if the criminal defense attorney and mother of two has her way, that will soon change.

"I still love practicing law, I still have a passion for it, but I'd rather make a living doing chocolate and take cases part time," says Edari, 44, who's been a trial lawyer for the last 15 years. Most recently she took on the high profile case of Geneke Laird, the Madison teen violently arrested by Madison police officers in June for allegedly waving a knife at East Towne Mall. She helped Laird enroll in Dane County's Restorative Justice program in lieu of facing immediate charges.

Less publicly over the last a decade, Edari has been building a business as a chocolatier, filling custom orders.

Edari is now hoping to step back from court and spend more time in the kitchen. For one thing, she's tired of the old boys' club legal system. "As a female attorney, as a female attorney of color, [it's a system] that doesn't want me in it, doesn't want single mothers in it," she says.

She's found the chocolate business far more welcoming. "I could be a bad ass lawyer and I still wouldn't get respect, but with chocolate, it transcends the bullshit," she says. "It doesn't matter who's behind it — if the chocolate is good, it's good, and people are going to buy it because they want it."





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#### Recommendation Letter of CocoVaa Chocolatier

To whom it may concern:

My name is Paul Edward, founder and owner of Chef Rubber. Chef Rubber is the world's leading producer of specialty products and custom tools for Chefs. Chef Rubber supplies some of the biggest chocolate companies in the world including M&M Mars Master Foods, to some of the smallest start ups in locations such as Rawanda. I have been in the industry for 50 years and have participated in and been instrumental as a company in providing new and innovative creations and solutions for the world's leading chefs.

As a major supplier of specialty items to some of the world's most esteemed chocolate companies, I've seen firsthand the passion, innovation, and tenacity it takes to flourish in this competitive yet rewarding industry. Vata, stands out as an emerging leader, with a truly groundbreaking company that has caught my attention, as well as that of others. From my testing of her product, she has mastered the foundational techniques to developing a unique style and creating signature products that are both aesthetically pleasing and gastronomically exceptional.

It isn't just her product line that impresses me, but Vata's deep understanding of the market, its challenges, and the vast opportunities that lie ahead. She has built a strong circle of industry experts to support her and she utilizes the resources in her network, including me and my team, to advise her as she grows. It is evident that her brand is not just in the business for short-term gains; they are building a legacy.

It makes perfect sense to me why Vata seeks to own her next building with expanded space at this stage of her company. As someone who has successfully scaled a chocolate company from its modest beginnings to a widely recognized brand, I intimately understand the challenges faced by businesses operating in limited spaces and the boundless potential that unfolds once those spatial constraints are alleviated. During the early stages of my own company's journey, we were confined to a space that, while adequate initially, soon began to restrict our growth. In a business where production intricacies, storage needs, and temperature sensitivities are paramount, space is not just a luxury—it is a necessity. Operating in a cramped environment directly affects not only production capacity but also

product quality and delivery options. It limits the scope for innovation, hampers efficient logistics, and impacts staff health - especially in the new COVID economic era where space to accommodate social distancing is likely a permanent fixture to keep manufacturing facilities running.

This industry, especially the luxury chocolate and confectionery sector, is ripe for scalable businesses. With global chocolate sales continuing to show consistent growth and consumers' unyielding demand for premium, artisanal products, the potential for a brand like CocoVaa is only limited by a lack of capitalization to grow. Boundless potential will unfold once CocoVaa's spatial constraints are alleviated. With its remarkable dedication to the craft and a clear vision for the future, CocoVaa has showcased the kind of potential that reminds me of my own company's nascent days. They have consistently delivered high-quality products, even within their current space constraints, and working successfully through a global pandemic - a testament to their skills, passion and resiliency. But like many ambitious entities, they are now at a crossroads where the size of their operational space could either curtail their aspirations or catapult them to new heights.

With the increased capacity, CocoVaa can tap into larger markets, diversify their product range, capture sales from the boom in demand for e-commerce and even venture into training and workshops, adding multiple revenue streams to their business.

I firmly believe that with the right support and financial backing, CocoVaa can transcend boundaries and establish itself as a leading name in the industry. Investing in them is not just funding a company, but backing an idea, a vision, and a future where quality and innovation reign supreme.

It's important to note that most large chocolate companies started like CocoVaa. This includes big names like See's Candy and even Mars Inc. whose founder, Frank, began in his grandmother's kitchen hand dipping chocolate. At some point they were capitalized and were able to grow. She deserves the same opportunity, and our industry is long overdue for the diversity she brings, something reflected in her product line.

To potential financiers, whether it be a bank or a private funder, I urge you to recognize the lucrativeness of this industry and the scalability of businesses like CocoVaa. Herein lies an opportunity to be part of a brand that, I am confident, will shape the chocolate world in the years to come.

Warm regards,

Paul Edward  
Founder & Owner, Chef Rubber  
702-614-9350  
[www.ChefRubber.com](http://www.ChefRubber.com)

