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tucson
MEET OUR
makers

Happy 2024! We're glad to have you here with us. This month, we'll introduce you to Adam Krantz, Tucson's real-life version of Willy Wonka. Keep reading to hear his story or click the "What's New" link below for the latest and greatest media updates from Tucson.

[What's New](#)



Meet Adam Krantz

While winning awards is admittedly validating, Adam Krantz of **Monsoon Chocolate** says that was never a motivating factor for becoming Tucson's first chocolate maker.

Krantz wants to spotlight Tucson's long culinary heritage through an ingredient whose consumption history among indigenous people in the Southwest dates back more than a thousand years – cacao.

"When I got started, there was a voice in the industry ... that was focused on

the providence of the cacao and making better chocolates than the next person,” Krantz said. “When you see a brand like Monsoon and you really dive into it, we’re telling a much bigger story than we’re making good chocolate. We’re not trying to be the best; we are trying to honor where we are from.”

Since 2017, Krantz has managed to accomplish both – gaining prominence in the talent-laden chocolate industry with recognition from the International Chocolate Awards and Good Food Foundation and developing regional partnerships that showcase heritage ingredients and products unique to the Southwest.

While Krantz admits that about 50 percent of his business stems from Monsoon’s more generic products like bonbons, he and his team have dedicated much of their time and energy over the past several years to developing outside-the-box recipes, like **Whiskey Del Bac Barrel-Aged 74 Percent Dark Chocolate**, Monsoon’s best-seller. The bar’s nearly five-month production process is a “labor of love” that more than justifies its hefty \$14.88 price tag, Krantz said.

“When I eat that bar, it feels like a 50-50 mashing of worlds, where I’m eating a chocolate bar, and there’s no alcohol in the product, but it is the perfect blend of Monsoon’s dark chocolate and **Whiskey Del Bac’s** whiskey,” Krantz said. “To do this, we take chocolate, we refine it, and get it to a finished state, and then we break it up into chunks and put those chunks inside a (recently drained) whiskey barrel ... Over four months, it’s absorbing the whiskey and oak (aroma) from inside the barrel.”



Krantz's partnership with Whiskey Del Bac is one of many he's forged over the past several years. He utilizes **Desert Provisions'** salt harvested from the Sea of Cortez in Monsoon's ever-popular *Sonoran Sea Salt* bar; mesquite flour produced by **San Xavier Co-Op Farm**, run by members of the Tohono O'odham Nation, is his *Mesquite White Chocolate* bar; and chiltepin peppers, the only chili pepper native to North America, from **Pivot Produce** in his *Rincon Collection Bonbon Box*. Each variety has its own unique production process, ranging from aging to infusing, that is merged with various types and quantities of cocoa butter during an extensive R&D phase.

Though some may consider Krantz's regional partnerships the stuff of marketing gold, he calls his business a bit of a "unicorn" because he's done

very little to intentionally market it. Like so many local businesses in Tucson, he credits his success to timing (he launched Monsoon shortly after Tucson was recognized as a UNESCO City of Gastronomy) and the support of the Tucson community.

“It’s staggering to me. When I opened this business there were just four of us, me included, running the entire operation, and now we have 25 employees and two properties,” Krantz said. “That’s why I’m really grateful. I feel like Tucson has really shown up for us. I think there is something unique and remarkable about Tucson because the people who live here are so committed to supporting local businesses and are genuinely interested in the use of local ingredients. That is an enormous part of our success – where we decided to operate.”

The Tucson native said when he launched his business, he had reservations about how the community would receive it. After all, for the four years preceding Monsoon’s launch, Krantz lived in Portland, a city flooded with chocolatiers and accustomed to the hefty price tag associated with developing premium chocolate. He made the leap, however, because he’s always felt drawn to Tucson, and after years of working at restaurants and later as a specialty food retailer in Tucson, he saw the destination’s untapped potential.

On the day Monsoon opened, his fears dissipated when “people formed a line out the door for chocolate and bonbons. I thought I had made enough bonbons to last a week, but they were sold out by the end of the day. It started a pattern that even to this day continues. No matter how much we scale up, the demand is scaling just a little bit faster than we can. It’s a good problem to have, but it is still a problem,” Krantz said.



In the coming year, Krantz will take on his biggest scaling challenge yet. He recently signed a national, exclusive distribution agreement with a specialty food retailer (he didn't share the name but assured me it's one of the nation's premier companies) that will roll out in early 2024. That dovetails another goal of his – to make premium chocolate accessible to more people, including those who can't spend \$10 for a chocolate bar.

His commitment to these longheaded goals means his business will have to shift from largely manual to more automation, which he champions because it will allow him to ramp up production with a Mexican cacao producer, with whom he just formalized an agreement. The agreement is the first of its kind for

Krantz, who in the past has sourced from Central and South American countries, as well as African nations.

“We now have a really good partnership developing in Mexico, which is a big deal because we ultimately want to primarily source from Mexico,” Krantz said. “It seems so obvious – you know Mexico is our neighbor and we should be able to source from them legally – but it’s been a lot more challenging than you would think because of socioeconomic and political implications. That said, Mexico has a really well developed, really diverse chocolate culture. Just last week, we received our first ton of cacao from Mexico. Nothing has been released yet, but we are moving into the R&D phase, and I’m really excited about it.”

Krantz’s hope is that as Monsoon continues to grow, so too will consumer knowledge about the Sonoran Desert, the lushest desert in the world, which spans 100,000 square miles and two nations.

“Our region is very special, and I think it’s more than just trending right now,” Krantz said. “There’s so much substance here in Sonoran Desert, and my hope is that as people become aware of it, they won’t be able to help and look at it, admire it, and want to dig deeper.”

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