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The Cholive Puts an End to Naked Cocktails

Milwaukee company brings chocolate to bars and restaurants

By Sarah Biondich



It's one of those ideas you kick yourself for not thinking of. While a dry martini is rarely served without an olive, or a gin and tonic without a lime, coffee liqueur- and cream-based cocktails are often left naked, without a single garnish to boost their character.

Graphic designer Joe Hausch observed this vacancy within the world's garnish caddies and came up with a simple but brilliant concept: the Cholive, featuring whole cream ganache in a rich, dark chocolate truffle. The olive-shaped Cholive can even fit on a toothpick.

A lot of people have great ideas for new products, but lack the business acumen needed to produce and market them to the right customers. Hausch teamed up with Josh Gentine, who, in addition to having a background in business and finance, brought invaluable insight into the restaurant and bar industry.

"Gourmet, premium chocolate is a \$2.5 billion industry," Gentine explains. "Yet, for the most part, it doesn't exist in bars and restaurants." Formed as the Cholive Co. in May 2007, Hausch and Gentine decided to be the first to bring it to that market.

Gentine had to find a way to keep production costs of the Cholive to a minimum so that bar and restaurant owners could

justify the purchase of the drink ornament. Because the Cholive is a truffle and not a solid piece of chocolate, a candy mold is necessary, as is an automated machine to deposit the creamy ganache. The partners had to find a company that fit somewhere between the massive Hershey companies of the world and artisans who craft their chocolate by hand.

"We had to call literally every chocolatier in the country to find somebody that had the ability to mass-produce a quality piece of chocolate," Gentine says.

After 18 months of searching, the Cholive Co. finally found a business in Vermont to make its truffles, and promptly shipped the chocolatier 100 molds from Switzerland to begin production.

Building a business on a garnish is challenging, so Gentine and Hausch sought advice from the top 100 restaurant groups in the country by sending samples of their Cholives and asking for feedback. Major cruise lines and dining dynasties like Morton's agreed: They liked what the Milwaukee-based partners were doing. The first restaurant in town to take the Cholive plunge was the Bosch Tavern in Hales Corners, and now the chocolate garnish can be found in more than 100 restaurants in 26 states.

The Cholive Co. also makes Chruffles, which are composed of the same 55% Swiss dark chocolate formula with whole cream ganache as the Cholive. Under the guidance of sommelier Guy Poitras, Gentine and Hausch matched 16 of their flavored Chruffles with various wines to create some excellent pairings. The Chruffles' clever packaging can be unfolded and used as a wine and chocolate pairing scorecard.

The Cholive Co. also offers a number of creative gift sets, like the martini lover's, which includes a metal cocktail shaker, two martini glasses and eight Cholive chocolates with skewers. In addition to restaurants and bars, the Cholive Co.'s sweets can be found at area liquor stores and grocery stores.

Surfing the trend of smaller portion sizes, the Cholive Co.'s chocolates are a perfect mini dessert—enough to satisfy the craving without eating or spending too much. And because of Gentine and Hausch, the chocolate martini will never have to be served naked again.

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