

TORONTO CENTRAL EDITION

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A woman with blonde hair, wearing a bright red sweater, is smiling warmly at the camera. She is in a chocolate shop, with shelves of various chocolates and candies visible in the background. Her right hand is resting on her forehead, and her left arm is crossed over her chest. In the foreground, there are several glass display cases filled with different types of chocolates and candies.

*Chocolate Shop Defines Toronto  
in a "Beautiful People" Way*

# Chocolate Shop Defines Toronto in a “Beautiful People” Way

By: Suzanne Sharma



Just north of “The Bridle Path and Post Road” is a tiny boutique offering one of the nicest shopping experiences in Toronto. It prides itself on the words “Beautiful Chocolates for Beautiful People.” Owner Ingrid Läderach Steven, though, explains her definition of Beautiful People is far deeper than outside beauty, and that she sees her shop as a place of comfort for those who have worked hard, succeeded, and now want to enjoy one of the niceties life has to offer.

Ingrid also takes pride that her chocolates have become part of a “magical moment” and “healing process” for many, bringing emotional satisfaction – as well as playing an important part in courtships, and endless parties and celebrations.

Proof of success over 21 years includes deliveries to the Queen Mother, the Pope, our Prime Minister, the President of the United States, many Hollywood and world celebrities, sportspeople,

and politicians -- even to the Space Shuttle Discovery for a preflight dinner (see [www.swissmaster.com](http://www.swissmaster.com) for thank you note from astronauts). And all this celebrity clientele has done much to continue to define the shop in a “Beautiful People” way.

Ingrid says she gets lots of invites to celebrity-functions by way of customers, even three invitations to the Academy Awards ceremonies that included meeting stars backstage before

the show, and at the famous Governor’s Ball after the show.

Another interesting part of her shop comes from “chocolate Oscars” sold for private and corporate awards, and often given to visiting celebrities, with just recent recipients being Paula Zahn and Robert Redford.

Ingrid is proud that her fresh cream truffles and pralines are the very same as in the best chocolate shops in Switzerland, which is not easy given that the product is extremely perishable. The chocolates are not “made special for export,” she emphasizes, as is the case with many imports. Plus she prides in telling her customers that, “For a price of locally-made chocolate you can buy at my shop some of the very best the world has to offer!”

Ingrid has several suppliers in Switzerland, but most of the chocolates come from the family-owned Läderach Chocolatier, that supplies much of Switzerland and some of the best shops around the world. Founder, Rud Läderach, invented the “truffle shell” that revolutionized truffle-making, taking it out of an expensive, very labour intensive process. She points out, though, that most of her truffles and pralines are still hand-finished individually.

When you walk into Swiss-Master you feel as if you are in Switzerland. And the impression one gets is that it is a lot more than just a “chocolate business” as it provides emotional uplift and sensual escape. It is decorated in old-continental style that “romanticizes” the products and services. And yes, it does take straight aim at a rich-and-famous-and-fussy clientele, with quiet emphasis on excellence at every turn. Ingrid believes strongly that, “To be good is not enough, if one aspires to be great!” No doubt this is what



separates her from competition.

“What keeps sales busy much of the year is the endless parties and gift-giving,” Ingrid says. But she adds that the very busy times start in November when corporations begin ordering. Then the rush does not stop until after Easter. What adds another dimension is the sizable wealthy Jewish, Chinese, Russian, and Muslim clientele who have their own celebrations.

The shop carries some 65 different “fresh cream” truffles and pralines flown in from Switzerland. At times the shop is so busy that lines form outside, “all the way around the corner occasionally,” Ingrid laughs. You’ll sometimes even find famous celebrities waiting patiently in line, happily chatting with others.

What also adds to the shopping experience is the Mercedes, BMWs, Hummers, and dark limos in the parking lot, especially during the Toronto Film Festival, or when celebrities are in town or when there’s a big sports event. Singer Prince was

a regular at the shop when he lived in Toronto. “He was an exceptionally gentle, warm person,” Ingrid says. “At first he would come with his body guard, but then felt comfortable enough to come alone.”

Ingrid also explains her shop is a pleasure for her that’s more than a business, and that over the years she’s watched kids grow up in her store, and gone to their birthday parties, bar mitzvahs, weddings, even funerals. As she puts it, “I’ve helped many celebrate their joys of life and shared in their sadness of life.”

From 1998 to 2003 Ingrid also had a successful Swiss-Master Chocolatier boutique in the heart of the financial district in Hong Kong, with visions of expanding into China. But as the economy there took a dip, followed by SARS, she and her partners closed it down.

One can’t help but notice she’s also a ‘hugging’ person, and people continually come for a hug and words of

encouragement, without need to buy. It is things like this that define her as the nice person she is, and that define the store and clientele in a “Beautiful People” way. This alluring warmth has made Ingrid the most popular chocolatier in town, and continues to bless Swiss-Master with endless media attention, including recent TV coverage in Europe. Even when the shop had a robbery, CTV-News sent a crew to report on the event live. And just recently celebrity cookbook writer, Rose Reisman, chose to have her magazine front-cover picture taken at Swiss-Master.

Ingrid explains her need to connect in beautiful ways with people comes from her heart, by way of how her parents ran their tourist shops in the Swiss Alps and San Remo, Italy. She also explains that she likes to think

of her shop as a fairytale boutique that sells “love and happiness” by way of what scientists tell us is a healthy-choice product, unlike many other “chocolates made with hydrogenated fats and a little bit of real chocolate” – what the industry calls “heart stoppers” and even “diarrhea chocolate.” It’s this “healthy-choice customer trust” in her chocolates that’s become very important to her success. Astronaut Dr. Roberta Bondar said the chocolates she brought along for the night-before-flight dinner were not even tested, as the name “Swiss-Master Chocolatier” gave automatic trust.

One thing people look forward to is the shop’s pick for its own “Beautiful People of the Year” choice on its website, which gets almost a million “hits” a year. What’s especially heartwarming

is the poem that comes with this theme, that reflects the outlook-on-life Ingrid seems to have, and it reads:

*“Beautiful People” is more than a skin deep description The most “beautiful people” I’ve known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss and have found their way out of the depths. These people have an appreciation, sensitivity, and understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern. “BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE” DO NOT JUST HAPPEN*

In 1999 Ingrid received a “Retailer of the Year” award in a black-tie event before some 600 guests. In her speech she had many women in tears as she thanked her “Swiss Master,” her husband.

The store celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2005, and there was a big party with tents and lots of samples and prizes, including a trip to Bermuda and a TagHeuer watch, and lots of people came to share in Ingrid’s celebration.

Ingrid looks to her husband, Tom, for support in the business. They are parents of daughters Jaclyn and Jasmin, and grandchildren Chloe and Connor. The daughters both worked many years at the store from the time they could stretch their necks around the showcase, and this is what has made it a family business.



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