

OUTSIDE THE KITCHEN

Chef-Chocolatier: Angela Ingrao

Residence: New Rochelle

Food Business: Cocoa in Larchmont

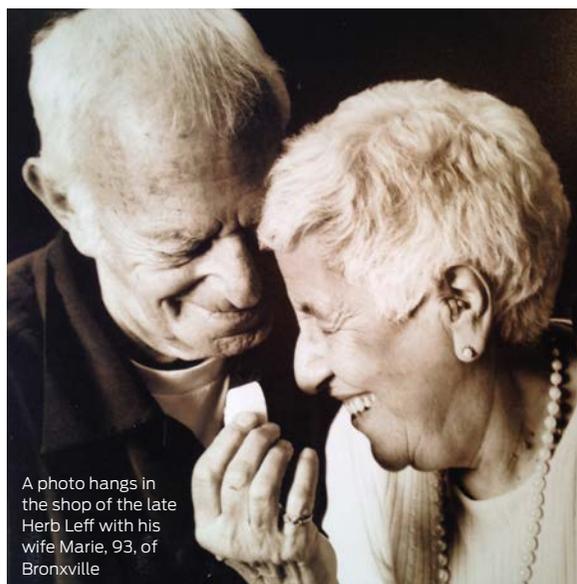


Chef Speak

“When we’d go out for Chinese food, Uncle Herb was always pushing us to try new flavors. My Italian family didn’t cook with ginger. He opened my eyes.”

Angela Ingrao cites two artistic influences: Marc Chagall and Uncle Herb. One wowed her at the Metropolitan Opera with paint, the other at her kitchen table with paper.

Uncle Herb was Herb Leff, an art teacher who lived near Ingrao’s family in Bronxville. “After school, we’d do art projects,” she says. There were Calder-like mobiles and Matissean cutouts. “He inspired my artistic aesthetic, which plays into my chocolate making. I always loved working with my hands.” Uncle Herb also happened to stock Mallomars, a childhood obsession. “They were enrobed in dark chocolate,” she notes. And Chagall? “My father loved opera; we’d go to the Met once or twice a year. The beautiful Chagalls [on display there] were another huge component [of my artistic development].”



A photo hangs in the shop of the late Herb Leff with his wife Marie, 93, of Bronxville

We’re sitting in her confection of a confectionary: powder-pink walls enveloping sheaves of nut-stippled bark, peanut-butter-cup domes and bonbons gold-flecked like fairy dust. Benevolently overlooking it all is a portrait of Uncle Herb. “He passed away but got to see the shop,” she says softly. “He was thrilled to have the portrait here.” She named a bark in his honor, as she does for cherished family and friends. His is gingerroot. But Uncle Herb’s influence seems to have extended beyond art. “When we’d go out for Chinese food, Uncle Herb was always pushing us to try new flavors. My Italian family didn’t cook with ginger. He opened my eyes.”

Today, lavender, cinnamon, and chili pepper all make appearances in her chocolate—of which dark remains her favorite. “As a kid, I’d squirrel the Special Dark out of the Hershey’s Miniatures bag,” she recalls, grinning. And when relatives from Italy and France visited, it got even better: They brought dark chocolate in bulk. There were, however, two summers when she did the visiting, with family road trips in Italy (Milan down through Sicily) and France (Paris to Avignon).

She’s done a lot of European traveling with her own three now-grown children, but in-between there were more prosaic journeys: to Manhattan, for college at Barnard and a fine-arts degree; to the New York Restaurant School, for pastry; and on to the Institute of Culinary Education and French Culinary Institute, for candy, bonbons, and truffles. “In the early ’80s, the culinary scene in the city was exploding,” she says. “The Silver Palate had opened; Dean & DeLuca was catering, and I would get lunch there. I loved working with my hands, especially making ceramics, and a teacher told me that pastry chefs and ceramists have things in common.” She took that suggestion and ran with it, making pit stops in restaurant pastry kitchens, with a final lap in Larchmont, when she opened Cocoa in 2002.

She’s 56 now, happily settled with a significant other and successful children. But she has a few more laps in mind. “I’d have an herb garden, to create my own tinctures, make ceramics and live near the water,” she muses. But that water wouldn’t be Long Island Sound. “Maybe Messina, Sicily, where my grandparents are from.” She considers: “Or the Aeolian Islands: Lipari or Volcano. I’d sit by the sea and drink nero d’avola.” I know that wine; it goes very well with dark chocolate.

—Diane Weintraub Pohl

WHAT THE HECK IS A...
Korean Melon



Description: Though there are many varieties of melons popular in Korea, the most common to North America is the chamoe, better known (in the US anyway) as the Korean melon. Approximately the size of a papaya, the oval fruit has a bright-yellow skin with a series of evenly spaced white seams running top to bottom. Inside, the look is similar to that of a honeydew melon, except its all white instead of pale green. In addition to the crisp flesh, the seeds and surrounding sweet pulp are targets for many Korean melon fans. The thin, yellow rind, however, while edible, is bitter.

Flavor Profile: The flesh, which is a few notches more supple than a pear, tastes of cantaloupe, pear, and even banana. Others say it has a mildly sweet-cucumber flavor.

Choosing a Good One: Avoid a melon with brown spots. Look for a firm melon with a dull, waxy texture that’s heavy for its size and yields slightly under pressure.

Storage: Store whole melons up to 5 days at room temperature. Once cut, wrap melon in plastic and refrigerate up to 3 days.

Culinary Uses: Similar to watermelon, Korean melon makes for a juicy and refreshing summer snack. Eat fresh in wedges or chop into cubes for an addition to fruit salads or green salads. It is also excellent for smoothies, ice cream, and other frozen desserts.

—JBT