

Finding the ‘Wei’ of Chocolate

Lisa Reinhardt '85 infuses her chocolate business with the lessons of her spiritual journey.

By Husna Haq

A SELF-DESCRIBED “SMALL TOWN GIRL” from western New York, **Lisa Reinhardt '85** has traveled far to become a meditation-advocating, socially responsible chocolatier.

Like the path to Nirvana, her journey to vegan chocolate-making was long and winding, characterized by an open mind and a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants philosophy.

The result? A unique, Phoenix-based business that turns out chocolates infused with Reinhardt's Eastern philosophy and global sensibility. It's an approach that she hopes will give those immersed in the hustle and bustle of Western culture food for thought.

“I realized that if you put an exquisite piece of chocolate in someone's mouth and tell them to just let it melt, not to chew, they would do the same thing they would do if meditating—rest in the present moment in rich mindfulness,” Reinhardt says. “Chocolate works in this culture; everyone speaks the language of chocolate.”

Founded in 2007, Wei of Chocolate—“wei” is a Chinese character that means “transformative action”—specializes in dark chocolate made from organic, vegan, and fair-trade ingredients. Featuring an assortment of chocolates infused with homeopathic flower, spice, and herb essences, including favorites such as “Wei Gratitude,” “Wei Love,” and “Wei Inspired,” the company is guided by Reinhardt's philosophy of balancing mind and body.

“I didn't want to make something bad for people,” she says. “For me, it had to be clean and healthy on every level: Good for the body, good for the mind, good for the environment, as well as karmically clean.”

An English and history major at Rochester, Reinhardt says French classes with the late professor Charles Carlton helped launch her journey as an entrepreneur.

“It was Professor Carlton who got me started on the whole odyssey,” she says, ex-



plaining that he encouraged her to apply for a fellowship to teach English in France. “I was just a small town girl,” Reinhardt says, “So when I got the fellowship, it turned my whole life upside down.”

Reinhardt worked in France for two years. One day she found herself in a Parisian park, knocking at the door of a Tibetan temple. There, a teacher began schooling her in Tibetan meditation practices. Reinhardt, who had practiced Zen Buddhism, but never the more colorful Tibetan meditation, says she was immediately intrigued.

▲ **SUCCESSFUL “WEI”:** Reinhardt is guided by the idea that her chocolate works on several levels: “Good for the body, good for the mind, good for the environment, as well as karmically clean.”

“I didn't want to just get a secondhand version, I really wanted to hear it straight from the source,” she says. “At the end of my time in Paris, I left for Asia.”

There, Reinhardt spent the next 11 years in Nepal, Tibet, and India, working in a monastery, meditating, living at times in a cave, and learning the Tibetan language. She adopted the Tibetan philosophy that everything should be done for the benefit of all living beings, a worldview that would later guide her entrepreneurial ventures.

When Reinhardt returned to the United States, in part to be near her aging parents, she experienced a case of culture shock.

“I missed a whole generation, and a lot had changed,” Reinhardt says, recalling how surprised she was by the frenetic pace of life in the U.S. She wanted to teach

Americans meditation, “but everyone was too busy,” she says. “No one wanted to hear about it.” So Reinhardt worked in publishing, advertising, and marketing as she decided her next move.

When friend Katie Hess, owner of Lotus Wei, an Arizona-based company that specializes in flower essences and oils, brought herb- and spice-infused chocolate truffles for a tea ceremony one afternoon, Reinhardt says, a light bulb went off.

Before she had even cooked up a plan, Reinhardt quit her job and began researching chocolate, researching the health literature, attending food shows, and talking to chocolatiers and suppliers.


Agreeing to participate at a local farmers’ market the same week that important pieces of her equipment arrived in the mail, Reinhardt launched Wei of Chocolate. Today, Reinhardt sells chocolate at 10 area farmers’ markets every week, as well as online and to spas nationwide.

For reviewers such as the online outlet the Mother Nature Network, the company is hitting a sweet spot. “Even flower essence skeptics will love the taste of Wei of Chocolate—deliciously creamy organic, vegan, and fair trade dark chocolates in decadent flavors. My favorite? Wei Love—chocolate with a kick of cayenne, plus cinnamon, ginger, mace, and maca, all of which give this treat a creamy yet grainy texture,” blogger Siel Ju wrote last summer.

And in December, Reinhardt was invited to showcase her chocolate at the ABC Home Store in Manhattan for a holiday shopping event.

“Lisa has been fearless about changing the paradigm of chocolate,” says Hess, who has worked closely with Reinhardt in founding and growing Wei of Chocolate. “She’s not afraid to try new things and innovate, and is especially talented at educating people about the more profound side of her business.”

Like the Chinese character her business is named after, Reinhardt is amazed at how Wei of Chocolate has transformed her life—and those of others.

“I created something where there was nothing before, and found a really creative way to accomplish something of meaning,” she says, “Something that could actually make people’s lives better.” 

Husna Haq is a Rochester-based freelance writer. For more about Wei of Chocolate, visit www.weiofchocolate.com.

In the News



AND THE GRAMMY NOMINEES ARE . . .

Nominees for the 54th annual Grammy Awards, which will be presented in Los Angeles on Feb. 12, include several Eastman alumni. Among this year’s nominees are:

Ron Carter ’59E, bassist. Best Improvised Jazz Solo for “You Are My Sunshine” on the album *This Is Jazz* (Half Note Records).

Renée Fleming ’83E (MM), soprano. Fleming performs the role of Violetta in the Royal Opera House production of Giuseppe Verdi’s *La Traviata*, which is up for Best Opera Recording.

John Hollenbeck ’90E, ’91E (MM), percussionist and composer. Best Instrumental Composition for “Falling Men” on the album *Shut Up and Dance* (Bee Jazz).

Christopher Lamb ’81E, percussionist. Best Classical Instrumental Solo for his performance in Joseph Schwantner’s *Concerto for Percussion and Orchestra*, recorded with the Nashville Symphony, on *Schwantner: Chasing Light . . .* (Naxos American Classics).

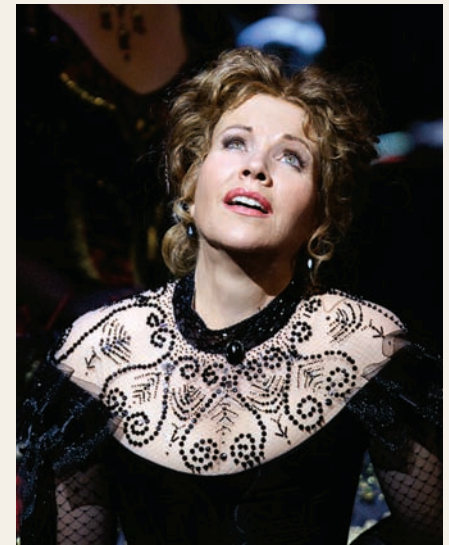
Alias Chamber Ensemble, including founder and violinist **Zeneba Bowers** ’94E, ’96E (MM), percussionist **Christopher Norton** ’83E, ’86E (MA), hornist **Leslie Norton** ’84E, harpist **Licia Jaskunas Vercruyse** ’94E, ’96E (MM), and eight other musicians. Best Small Ensemble Performance for *Hilos* (Naxos American Classics).

Robert Ludwig ’66E, ’01E (MM), mastering engineer. Best Engineered Album, Non-Classical for *Music is Better than Words* (Universal Republic), performed by Seth McFarlane.

ARCHAEOLOGIST DISCOVERS ICE AGE ART

A discovery made by a team led by University of Tübingen archaeologist and paleoanthropologist **Nicholas Conard** ’83, ’86 (MS) has turned out to be the earliest example of cave painting ever to be found in Central Europe. Archaeologists have long known about Ice Age cave paintings in France and Spain, but Conard’s discovery of the 15,000-year-old paintings in southern Germany’s Hohle Fels Cave, near the city of Ulm, is considered a breakthrough. The paintings consist of parallel rows of red dots, made from mixing hematite with calciferous drops of water, on limestone fragments.

The paintings aren’t the only groundbreaking discovery Conard and his team have made in the Hohle Fels Cave. They also found a flute made from bone and fragments of flutes carved from mammoth ivory dating from approximately 35,000 years ago, and a female figurine, dating from the same period (“Finding a New ‘Venus,’” *Rochester Review*, July-August 2009).



NOMINEE: Renée Fleming as Violetta in the Royal Opera’s production of *La Traviata*