

IN THE KITCHEN

Form & Function

Handcrafted Food As Art

By Lib Ramos

Art, like food, is personal and extremely powerful. When we discuss art, we inevitably talk about taste, a word that leads us right back into the realm of food and flavor.

The traditional definitions of art and craft have been broadening over the past few years, partly in response to the creativity and skill artisans are bringing to the table. Literally.

What was once exclusively the domain of farmers markets and roadside stands has evolved into an inspiring industry of its own: artisan food. Gardeners, farmers, chefs, hobbyists and entrepreneurs are perfecting their recipes and techniques to create products that feel at home at a craft show and a grocer.

The growth of artisan food makers

across the country has been encouraged by the evolution of new support systems. In Greenville, this includes more retailers interested in carrying local products and the increasing availability of commercial kitchens for rent. Imagine Kitchen, Naked Kitchen and the Old Mill Shared Kitchen each rent space to entrepreneurs, bridging the gap between home-based food businesses and full-blown production kitchens. Within six months, eight food makers joined Imagine Kitchen's state of the art facility, and there's plenty of room for more.

Swamp Rabbit Cafe & Grocery, the cornerstone of local food enthusiasm in Greenville, also just completed a major expansion to their store. Owner Mary Walsh says "Since we opened five years ago,

we've seen a major increase in the amount of cool, fun and tasty artisan food products that come to the market, especially Southern ones. It feels like we bring in a new product from a small-scale maker at least once a week, which is pretty impressive for a small market like ours."

Today's food entrepreneurs not only experience the benefits of farmers markets and these new resources, they have the power of the internet on their side. This makes it even more important for them to invest in quality branding and packaging so they can stand out online and on the shelves.

While mainstream brands have begun to co-opt the word *artisan*, its true meaning implies both craft and story. Here are just three of the stories behind the products.



Doux South

Atlanta, GA | www.douxsouth.com

DEVILED AND DILLY EGGS

These simple, sharp-tasting deviled eggs are a perfect way to show off good pickles. Garnish with crisp bacon, fresh dill, smoked paprika or Doux South Chow Chow.

6 large farm eggs

- 1/2 jar (8 ounces) of Doux South Angry Cukes, brine reserved
- 1/4 cup Duke's Mayo
- 1 teaspoon salt

Place eggs in a pot of cold water to just cover and bring to a boil. Cover pot, turn off heat and let sit for 8 minutes. Then place the eggs in a bowl of ice water and peel keeping the eggs under the water. This will help them peel easily.

Cut eggs in half lengthwise, and core out yolk, reserving the white on the side.

In your food processor, process the yolks, Angry Cukes, mayo and salt until creamy.

Place yolk mixture into a piping bag with a star tip and pipe into reserved egg white shells. Top deviled egg with your favorite garnish. Refrigerate until served. Makes 12.

As is the case with many artisan food businesses, the story of Doux South Pickles began around a family table. Atlanta chef Nick Melvin brought a batch of his homemade pickles to a family gathering. This simple gesture inspired a business partnership between Nick and his in-laws, Mark and Debbie.

Each of the Doux South products are made with natural ingredients and no preservatives. Nick creates the brine recipes (which are different for each vegetable), and in the early days, family members and friends were recruited to a shared kitchen to help with production on weekends.

Their involvement with Atlanta-area farmers markets led to increased retail and online sales. Just months after Doux South began selling products, they moved production to a larger leased kitchen space.

The company now offers a full line of pickles, mustards and pepper relishes. Doux South sells to a wide range of both retail stores and restaurants all across the country. In fact, their full line of jarred products can be purchased at Whole Foods stores throughout the Southeast, and found in bulk on the olive bars there. To meet the demands of growth, they will soon move to a 6000-square-foot production facility.

Even as the business has grown, the family hasn't lost sight of their vision. "We still hand-pack and make all of our pickles, mustards and relishes in house with a small group of part-time employees and two full-time employees," says Debbie. And Doux South is about more than just pickles. Their hope is to spread love for the Southern tradition of pickling and educate others about the ways pickles can be incorporated into home cooking.



French Broad Chocolates

Asheville, NC | www.frenchbroadchocolates.com

If you've ever visited Asheville, you may be familiar with the French Broad Chocolate Lounge. Or at least noticed a line of people waiting outside the front door to get in. Jael and Dan Rattigan opened the lounge in 2008 and have now expanded to three storefront locations: The Chocolate Lounge, The Chocolate Factory, and a new boutique, Chocolate+Milk.

French Broad Chocolates is a bean-to-bar chocolate company famous for their truffles, bars, cakes, cookies and cozy environment. Their love for chocolate has its roots in Costa Rica. While living there, Jael and Dan purchased an abandoned cacao farm and started a desert shop. Life eventually led them to Asheville, where they began to pursue chocolate making from their home kitchen, selling chocolate online and at farmers markets.

As their product line expanded, their popularity did too. The lounge added more space in 2009 and

moved to a new location in 2014. Eight years into the business—and now 75 employees strong—French Broad Chocolates is well-known not only for their chocolate but also for their values. They use local and organic ingredients to the fullest extent possible and operate their business with an understanding of the big picture. To other entrepreneurs Jael says, "Know WHY you want to grow. Growing to achieve a goal will motivate you and inspire you when times are tough. Want to support farmers? Empower marginalized individuals? Create local jobs? This meaningful sense of purpose will fuel your fire."

Retailers across the country carry French Broad Chocolates, and their work is also showing up in unexpected places. Restaurants and even craft breweries are incorporating their chocolate and cacao nibs into recipes and brews. You can try it yourself, and bring their signature Liquid Truffle drink home.

FRENCH BROAD LIQUID TRUFFLE

You can infuse this drink with subtle or bold flavors. The folks at French Broad Chocolate like to add syrups like salted caramel, lavender or maple. We encourage you to play with those, but also get creative and try some of your own!

- 2 ounces milk chocolate, finely chopped
- 2 ounces dark chocolate, finely chopped
- 1/4 cup heavy cream
- 1 1/2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 tablespoon maple syrup
- 10 ounces half & half

Make the ganache: Place the chocolates in a medium heat-safe bowl. Bring the cream, butter and syrup to a boil in a small saucepan over medium-high heat. Pour the boiling cream mixture over the chopped chocolate and set aside for 2 minutes. Then use a whisk or immersion blender to blend the chocolate mixture until smooth.

When you're ready, make the liquid truffle: Transfer the ganache and half-and-half to the saucepan and set it over medium-low heat. Whisk constantly until the mixture comes to a simmer. Turn off the heat and pour small servings into 4 ounce cups. Enjoy!



Jonathan Caleb Cakes

Simpsonville | www.jonathancalebake.com

Jonathan Russ began experimenting with cakes and confections in 2009, but it wasn't until he made macarons in his loft apartment kitchen last year as Christmas gifts that the idea of a business began to take shape. After posting photos online, people began asking where they could buy the macarons. Even as the holiday season passed, interest continued to grow. Jonathan began offering, via Instagram, a limited supply of beautifully packaged macarons with interesting flavor combinations like Lemon Raspberry and Honey Lavender. Customers would arrange a time for pickup, and business began to take off.

Jonathan's background in the arts (he holds a degree in graphic communications from Clemson University) led him to focus on developing a strong brand identity

from the very beginning. When it came to packaging the products, he says "I knew I wanted a box that would be just as special as the cookies inside." He has also developed a very distinctive style of product photography to take full advantage of the visual medium of Instagram. His philosophy: "Cakes and confections should be fun, so I like to keep my colors bright and love contrasting bold hues with pastels. I think the visuals I create have played a huge role in driving sales and establishing my brand. You always eat with your eyes first, and a beautiful image can be so captivating you just have to try it for yourself." He shares a few of his photography tips for other aspiring food entrepreneurs. 🍪

You can meet each of these makers at Indie Craft Parade in Greenville this fall.

Indie Craft Parade
September 17, 9am-6pm
September 18, 11am-5pm
Huguenot Mill
101 West Broad Street
www.indiecraftparade.com

LEI RAMOS IS THE CO-FOUNDER/CREATIVE DIRECTOR FOR MAKERS COLLECTIVE, A NONPROFIT BASED IN GREENVILLE THAT EMPOWERS CREATIVE ENTREPRENEURS WHILE CULTIVATING A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY AROUND THEM. THE ORGANIZATION HOSTS LARGE AND SMALL EVENTS, INCLUDING INDIE CRAFT PARADE AND THE MAKERS SUMMIT.



Recipe for Great Product Photography

1

Consider investing in a nice camera.

Photos of your product can only be so good on a smart phone no matter how great the camera is.

2

Take advantage of shooting in natural light.

Food looks so much more incredible in soft natural light! I shoot all of my photos by a large window.