

ASHOKE GHOSH

Nothing Like Chocolate

A FILM BY

Kum-Kum Bhavnani

by Jennifer LeMay

Where does chocolate come from? The simple answer is that it comes from the fruit of an improbable plant (the cacao tree, *Theobroma cacao*) that bears no resemblance to the finished product. The real answer is more complicated.



STEVEN BROWN

Filmmaker Kum-Kum Bhavnani.

When filmmaker Kum-Kum Bhavnani learned that children harvest much of the world's cocoa (as the fruit of the cacao is confusingly known), and that some are trafficked to and

enslaved in West Africa, she decided her next film would focus on the chocolate industry and bring attention to their plight.* Her approach would be to highlight examples of ethical and sustainable chocolate making and show how these practices are so different from—and superior to—those of the mainstream chocolate industry.

“I wanted to make a film that is not only about suffering, but about people who are doing things right,” explained Bhavnani, who is also a professor of sociology at UC Santa Barbara. In this way, her film *Nothing Like Chocolate* follows in the same vein as her award-winning earlier film *The Shape of Water*, which depicts intimate stories of women working for social justice around the world, and how some of them are making tremendous strides.

In her search for exemplary chocolate-making operations, she hit filmmaker pay dirt when she came across the Grenada Chocolate Factory and its eccentric founder, who would become the focus of the film. Nestled in lush cocoa groves in Grenada's pristine rainforest, the factory produces high-quality organic dark chocolate from its own world-famous cocoa beans. Anarchist chocolate maker Mott Green, who founded the company in 1999, is magnetic on camera as he passionately describes the bean-to-bar process that yields some of the world's

* A 2009 Tulane University study estimated that in the previous year, 819,921 children in the Ivory Coast and 997,357 children in Ghana worked on cocoa-related activities, and that only 5%–10% received pay for their labor. It is difficult to track the actual number of enslaved children in West Africa, as many work on their families' land. Tulane University, under contract with the U.S. Department of Labor to oversee public and private efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor in the cocoa sector in the Ivory Coast and Ghana, is working with governments and industry to monitor and promote measures to improve the situation.

finest chocolate. He outlines the many ways the company is “doing things right,” which include paying high wages to the farmers and factory workers—all of whom are part of a cooperative established by the company—and by growing and processing the cocoa in an environmentally sustainable manner.

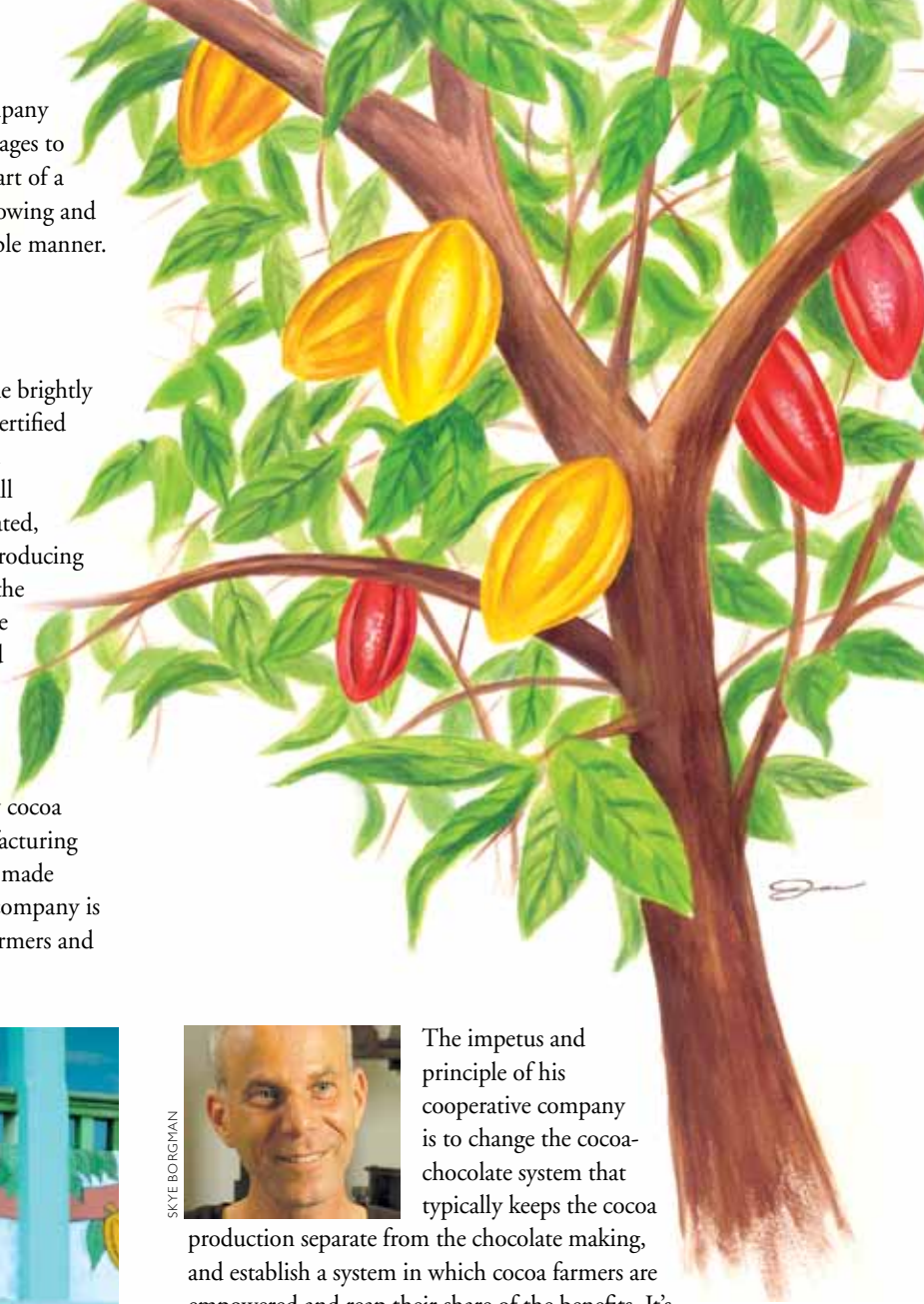
Growing and Processing Cocoa at the Grenada Chocolate Factory

Cacao beans are white and pulpy, and sit snugly inside brightly colored pods. Grenada Chocolate Factory beans are certified organic (and as such, fetch a higher price), fermented and dried naturally in the sun and processed in a small factory that is solar-powered and equipped with updated, refurbished antique machinery built specifically for producing the highest quality chocolate. It’s not surprising that the attention and care that goes into this artisan chocolate making correlates with taking care of the workers and the land that have made it possible.

Nothing Like Chocolate gives us a glimpse of the fascinating chocolate-making process that is a mystery to so many chocolate lovers, and shows how cocoa farmers involved in most industrial chocolate manufacturing operations are unfamiliar with the finished products made from their beans. Mott explains in the film that his company is revolutionizing the connection between the cocoa farmers and the final product.



Interview with Mott Green at the Grenada Chocolate Company.



SKYE BORGMAN



The impetus and principle of his cooperative company is to change the cocoa-chocolate system that typically keeps the cocoa

production separate from the chocolate making, and establish a system in which cocoa farmers are empowered and reap their share of the benefits. It’s a system that also benefits the consumer, as this kind of chocolate production invariably results in a better product. At the Grenada Chocolate Factory, for instance, onsite fermentation and cocoa butter production yield an extra rich and chocolaty flavor.

The Grenada Chocolate Factory has 150 acres of organic cocoa farms in its cooperative and harvests the *trinitario* bean, a flavorful variety that accounts for only 5%–10% of the world’s cocoa. Grenadian *trinitario* cocoa derives its distinct flavors from a combination of genetics, climate and soil. Last year, the company brought in 20 tons of cocoa beans and produced 250,000 chocolate bars. Everything is done at the factory, including packaging. One-third of the bars are sold in Grenada, and the remainder are exported, mainly to Europe and also to the United States. Consumers get to enjoy the company’s excellent products, including a bar called “Nib-A-Licious” that contains cocoa nibs (tiny pieces of roasted cocoa), while knowing where and how the cocoa was grown and processed. Industrial

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chocolate operations usually mix cacao beans from many places, making it impossible to know their origins.

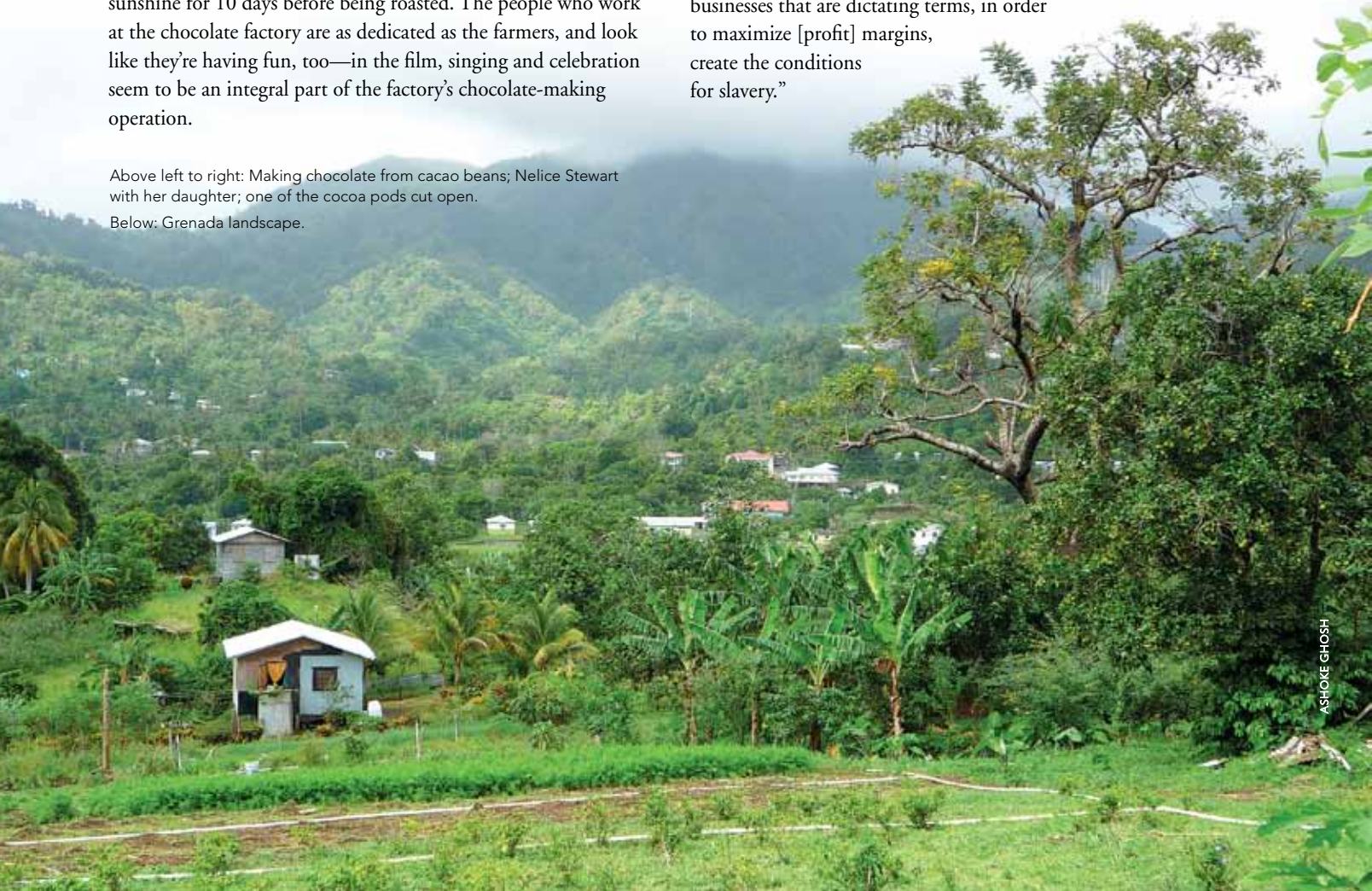
One of the newest farmers about to join the cooperative, Nelice Stewart, also grows other crops, including citrus, peas, nutmeg and bananas. Like Mott, she is passionate about working the land and says she “loves it all” when it comes to growing food. Her unique perspective as a woman farmer in Grenada adds yet another dimension to the film. She was delighted to learn that another benefit of joining the cooperative is that the company comes to each farm to collect the beans and then takes them to the factory, where they are weighed, meticulously documented, fermented and then dried in large drawers that open to the sunshine for 10 days before being roasted. The people who work at the chocolate factory are as dedicated as the farmers, and look like they’re having fun, too—in the film, singing and celebration seem to be an integral part of the factory’s chocolate-making operation.

Above left to right: Making chocolate from cacao beans; Nelice Stewart with her daughter; one of the cocoa pods cut open.

Below: Grenada landscape.

Cacao: From Mystical and Sacred Plant to Industrial Product

Vandana Shiva, renowned activist and physicist, explains in *Nothing Like Chocolate*, “Cocoa is a very sacred plant for traditional cultures. In Mexico the original bartering was through the cocoa pod—it was currency.” Historically, the beans were consumed in a strong, bitter beverage and were praised as a “food of the gods.” She stresses that the problem of child slave labor in the cocoa industry is not to be blamed on the local areas where it is happening, but on the global monopolies and control by corporations that have engendered the practice. “As with any product—whether it be clothing, coffee or chocolate—giant businesses that are dictating terms, in order to maximize [profit] margins, create the conditions for slavery.”




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Shiva contends that decentralized, artisanal production of many kinds of products is vital, as it generates dignified work, increases skill sets and deters adulteration of products such as industrial chocolate.

Shiva finds it a tragedy that “the honest, ethical producer is burdened with having to say ‘I’ve done it right’—that unfair trade is the rule and fair trade the exception.” Cocoa can only be grown in the equatorial regions, and she points out that farmers must be able to grow crops to feed their communities in addition to growing cocoa, in order to be sustainable. “Localization does not mean that people should only live on what they can produce locally, but it does mean that local economies must not be destroyed in order to supply commodities more cheaply someplace else.” She says that such a system is, in the long run, like a house without a foundation.

Moving away from inexpensive, exploitative, inferior cocoa products to high-quality, ethically and sustainably produced chocolate may seem daunting. Michael Pollan, bestselling author of *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, points out in the film that successful boycotts in protest of working conditions have a history in the United States and elsewhere. For instance, people in England in the 1800s boycotted sugar to protest slavery. There is a movement afoot, says Pollan, of bringing values to our decisions about what to eat. He calls it “voting with your fork.” In his opinion, the organic industry should have included labor conditions in its certification standards.

While industry has been successful in driving down the price of food—including chocolate—it has often done so at the expense of product quality and social and environmental justice. Pollan explains that the pressure to cut costs at every step has led to replacing expensive ingredients, such as cocoa butter, with less expensive ones like palm or corn oil. He notes that imitation products are rarely labeled as such, and wonders when chocolate will no longer be chocolate. He adds that cheap food may not really be so cheap, when one factors in corn and soy subsidies, the costs to the environment, and increased health care expenses.

Nothing Like Chocolate sheds light on the many ways that humans have connected to the cacao plant, and to the chocolate that comes from it. Neurobiologist David Presti says that cocoa has a rich history of being revered for thousands of years and creates an elusive kind of euphoria when ingested, adding that he sees “great potential for the development of a true alchemical, artisan industry that would be beneficial for everyone involved.” Thanks to *Nothing Like Chocolate*, more people will know where their chocolate comes from, and appreciate the many benefits of ethical and sustainable production. 

Visit the film website at NothingLikeChocolate.com

Nothing Like Chocolate will be screened in Santa Barbara in January or February 2012. Check the film website for more information.

Jennifer LeMay is a designer and artist who appreciates great local food. Her communication design firm, J. LeMay Studios, provides outreach strategy and design services. Visit her website at jlemay.com.

Resources

Chocolate Maya

A wide collection of organic and fair trade chocolate from reliable sources (including Grenada Chocolate Factory bars) as well as handmade, organic chocolate truffles and confections.

15 W. Gutierrez St.
Santa Barbara
chocolatemaya.com



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Chocolate Opulence

Handmade chocolates using traditional European methods and high quality, natural ingredients.

819 State St. (Paseo Nuevo), Santa Barbara
chocolateopulence.com

Chocolats du CaliBressan

Handmade, artisan, French chocolates made locally and sourcing fair trade chocolate.

4193 Carpinteria Ave., Suite 4, Carpinteria
1114 State St., #25 (La Arcada), Santa Barbara
chococalibressan.com

Jessica Foster Confections

Local, handmade, gourmet chocolates from ethical and sustainable sources.

jessicafosterconfections.com

L’Artisan du Chocolat

Freshly made chocolate confections from Los Angeles, Rainforest Alliance, fair trade certified.

artisanduchocolat.com

Patchi

Handmade, artisanal chocolate supporting fair trade.

patchi.us

Santa Barbara Chocolate Company

Specializing in fair trade organic chocolate truffles, wholesale and bulk chocolate.

santabarbarachocolate.com

Sweet Earth Chocolates

Specializing in fair trade organic chocolates.

sweetearthchocolates.com

Sweet Nuit

Handcrafted, organic, vegan, raw, molded chocolates from Santa Monica, using ethical and sustainable sources.

sweetnuit.com

Twenty-Four Blackbirds

Locally produced bean to bar chocolate using ethical and sustainable sources.

24blackbirdschocolate.com