

The Mouth

By Nanci Tangeman

Unhip and bad for the hips

Van Velze's Chocolaterie & Patisserie
Eerste Oosterparkstraat 7, 337 4125
Open: Mon-Sat, 08.00-18.00
Cash only

This place is not hip. I know because Deborah behind the counter just told me. Van Velze's Chocolaterie and Patisserie has hardwood floors, trendy furniture and a big window with a stylish logo. You could even say it's in an edgy neighbourhood. But I can see Deborah's point. The edgiest aspect of the street is that it's on the periphery of an area where families can still afford to live. That big window welcomes neighbours into the new shop to perch on the high modern chairs and peer into the glassed-in chocolate kitchen in back. The wooden floors are probably just easier to mop after the chocolate-making workshops (€35/person) Van Velze's is beginning to host.

I concede. Deborah is right. And she certainly should know. She's the woman behind everyman Robbert van Velze, whose family has been making chocolate longer than the Heinekens have been making beer. Robb (30) and Irishwoman Deborah Kilroy (20) were backpacking through Australia when they met. Van Velze's is the culmination of a long-held dream. For months they've been fattening up co-workers at their day jobs, getting ready to go full-time at the shop. Now their dream is their day job (and their evening job, and their weekend job).

To be honest, I'm usually incognito when I go some place to review it. But one of those fattened-up co-workers drags me in to



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taste Robb's creations. My cover's blown. Immediately I worry about what I'm going to write if I don't like the place.

Especially when Robb gives me a chocolate with creamy elderberry filling to taste. I don't like creams; they're usually too sweet. But this one tastes like chocolate and elderberries. Robb and his mom hand-picked the elderberries! Not in the Vondelpark, he assures me, but in a monastery garden. The filling is mixed with the elderberry juice and covered with white chocolate. The raspberry cream with dark chocolate is just as distinctive. So are the port and cranberry combination, the fennel chocolates and the Guinness-filled creations—yes, you read correctly. (€1/piece; 5 for €3.15; €45/kilo.)

Robb tells me that the Costa Rican cocoa they use is certified by the Rainforest Alliance. I feel good inside (and it's not just the chocolate).

Now we're moving on to the patisserie half of the shop. I try the cappuccino mousse (€3.25). It's Robb's grandfather's recipe made from brewed Illy espresso; no mocha flavouring here.

I can taste the difference—a lot like a cup of coffee (a really, really creamy cup of coffee). The cake that takes the cake, however, is Robb's Heavenly Chocolate Tart (€3.50). It is.

For chocolate haters there is baked cheesecake, carrot cake or a lemon-mango or fruits of the forest tart (all €3.25). They're good enough to make you hate chocolate. (Somebody else's chocolate).

I'm relieved that I'm not going to have to pan the place—especially since Robb and Deborah are so darn adorable. I say my goodbyes with my professional integrity intact. Too bad I can't say the same for my waistline.