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### DISH

## Cocoa Room offers a true chocolate experience

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What do you do when you've developed an intense addiction to chocolate—really good chocolate—and there's none to be found in the city you now call home? Well, in the case of Kerstin Roos, you open up an on-line business that imports the best of the best. Not only are you able to satisfy your own cravings, you can then initiate countless other fortunate souls to the intricacies of the whole delicious chocolate experience.



Kerstin Roos is passionate about chocolate, something immediately evident from the moment you descend the gently sloping ramp and emerge into her newly opened shop, The Cocoa Room. Inside, you are surrounded on all sides by everything chocolate, like a dream you never want to wake from. Unique chocolate bars, assorted boxes of chocolates, glorious chocolate you can drink, soothing beverages that you can enjoy while savouring chocolate and even glossy books about chocolate. If you stand in the middle of the cozy room and let your senses take over, the effect is overwhelming.

For Roos, chocolate is without a doubt a multi-sensory experience, one she wants to share with anyone and everyone. She wants people to experience the pure taste of good chocolate, unmasked by “other” ingredients and too much sugar; she wants them to luxuriously savour the smooth, lingering sensation of chocolate melting in their mouths. And she wants them to inhale deeply and experience the heady, intoxicating aroma that encompasses them. The “mmms” and “oohs” that escape from unsuspecting mouths as samples are nibbled and sipped are added benefits.

Roos was fortunate enough to develop a taste for good chocolate at a young age. Time in Edmonton meant a forced hiatus, but after moving to Japan to teach English, she was once again exposed to premium chocolate and her passion was reignited. A journey to glorious New York, just as the city was in the midst of a chocolate revolution, solidified her fascination. She credits New York with exposing her to the full spectrum of chocolate possibilities, as it was there she became immersed in the whole chocolate culture—savouring chocolate, becoming educated about chocolate and learning to make chocolate.

Once she got back to Edmonton, she found it hard to satisfy her intense chocolate addiction, so Roos opened up an on-line chocolate business in 2004, importing fantastic premium chocolate. That, along with hosting chocolate tastings to inform and educate people on the intricacies of chocolate, kept her busy but a bit unfulfilled.

One thing led to another and in 2006, Roos started to make her own chocolate, the “Chocophilia” line, right here in Edmonton. She uses single-origin chocolate, meaning all the beans come from one specific region. It is a relatively new trend in chocolate making—most chocolate makers still blend

chocolate, using different beans from different areas. With single-origin chocolate, you can actually taste the subtle differences between the different regions, making specific kinds of chocolate more unique. Earthy, fruity, mellow and intense undertones all vary depending on where the bean was grown. Roos takes premium single-origin chocolate and adds a bit of a twist, or in the case of her Hot Chocolate (chocolate with cayenne pepper), a bit of punch.

Originally, the Chocophilia line was only available wholesale. But because most of her interactions were via the computer or phone, she missed the human connection. She wanted to talk to people about chocolate, educate people about chocolate, and see the expression on people's faces when they ate amazing chocolate.

So, early this year, Roos's vision of one day opening a retail chocolate shop was finally realized. Early February saw the grand opening of The Cocoa Room, an oasis of chocolate delights. Set foot in the shop and prepare to be mesmerized by all things chocolate. Roos or one of her staff will amaze you with their enthusiasm, their knowledge and their passion. The contagious enthusiasm will rub off on you and, before you know it, you will be learning a bit about the fascinating history of chocolate—it was such an integral part of ancient civilization that the Aztecs and Mayans actually used the cocoa bean as currency. It was as revered back then as it is today in The Cocoa Room.

The enthusiasm carries over as the discussion turns to the shop and they passionately tear open bars and gently lift lids off boxes, urging you to taste a morsel, sample a bite and savour a sip. As I nibbled my way through the shop, I was especially impressed with their chocolate caviar and the rich sipping chocolate—almost like warm, dark, intense, liquid chocolate. It's made with or without spices and, before I knew it, a small cupful of the spicy version was pressed into my hand. I was somewhat skeptical because, although they won't divulge the secret spices, cayenne pepper is on the list. Cayenne pepper and chocolate just didn't seem like a natural fit to me, but I was so wrong. The cayenne has a gentle heat that lingers and warms, radiating contentment throughout your whole body.

The Cocoa Room is enabling Roos to expand her line of delicious chocolate. The day I visited, I got a glimpse of their Easter egg molds. Kind of amazing —it was less than three weeks until Easter and they were just going to start making the eggs. (Talk about fresh eggs.) Expect more seasonal delicacies, more organic chocolate for kids, and a truffle of the week.

They also hold chocolate tastings; for \$15, you can sample a range of different kinds of chocolate and educate your palate as well as your mind. The next tasting is Thu, Mar 27. In April, they're going to start hosting 3- to 4-hour chocolate-making workshops.

Venture off the beaten path and seek out The Cocoa Room. Immerse yourself in the whole delicious chocolate experience, and watch Roos's eyes light up with enthusiasm as she helps you find your passion. But be warned: once you've had the good stuff, there's no going back. **V**

### **The Cocoa Room**

*10139 - 112 St, 990.0011*

*Tue( 2 pm - 6 pm)*

*Wed (11 am - 6 pm)*

*Thu (11 am - 7 pm)*

*Fri (11 am - 6 pm)*

*Sat (10 am - 5 pm)*

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