

Off the shelf

Helen Greenwood

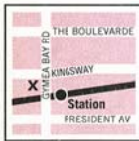
Smooth operator

Infectious enthusiasm, magnetic attraction. We must be talking chocolate.

Nina's Chocolates

27 GYMEA BAY ROAD,
GYMEA
TEL: 9526 6770.

Mon-Fri 9am-5.30pm,
Sat 9am-1pm.



Best Buys:
Liqueur plums:
\$6.50/100g
Caramel praline:
\$6.50/100g
Raspberry cream:
\$6.50/100g

Prices do not include GST.



GyMEA Bay village is a collection of shops and cafes near a train station, with orange-tinged plane trees and a bitter wind taking the edge off a brilliant winter sun. It's not the first place that comes to mind when you mention handmade chocolates.

But here George Magganas has set up a shop that rustles with the sound of cellophane, its centrepiece a counter of dusters, pralines and fondant-filled chocolates.

Magganas is a former food technologist for Unilever who caught the truffle bug when he was still talking fats for the confectionery industry. Trips to Antwerp, swapping cocoa notes with the men from Mars, but most of all, getting to know his hero, Jan ter Heerdt from Bellefleur, have all teen the stepping stones to his handmade chocolate shop.

"It's the smell, the romantic wow factor," says Magganas. "Of all the food industries I had contact with when I was working with Unilever I had a magnetic attraction for chocolate."

It's not as though Magganas comes from a long line of confectioners. His mother, a secretary, and his father, a fitter and turner, left Greece to live in Egypt, then came to Australia when he was eight.

He grew up in the Sutherland Shire and it has been a point of honour for him to keep his business there, first in Kirrawee, then in GyMEA.

"People told me I was mad opening in GyMEA," he says. "They told me I should be in Rose Bay."

Like the proverbial mad scientist, Magganas started playing around in a spare room and within a couple of years had a full chocolate laboratory at home. His idea was to tinker until he reired and then take it further, but redundancy five years ago forced his hand. He and his wife, May, decided to go into business. (He called it Nina's after his daughters Nicole and Natalie). Within two years, the self-taught chocolatier had orders from Sydney hotels and he was off and running.

They are still the mainstay of his business. As we



Sweet talker: George Magganas has turned his passion for chocolate into a business. George felling

move through the open production area, he picks up a dark chocolate basket he will fill with handmade chocolates for the VIP rooms, and points to the petits fours for buffets, banquets and brasseries.

Three machines temper dark, milk and white Belgian couverture and a team of people turns out the moulds, decorates and packs. In Magganas's office out back, thick books on Swiss *confiserie* lie open at pages of different soft and hard-filled chocolates.

The art is in the centre work. Magganas has a sweetly subtle palate, preferring creaminess and

smooth flavours that develop a long aftertaste to a more upfront effect.

He makes about 90 types of filled chocolates as well as novelty and festive lines.

"Until a few years ago" says Magganas, "people didn't use chocolate as a currency to say thank you or to take to a dinner party. But that is changing."

And it's probably got a lot to do with his infectious enthusiasm for his product, which he has passed on to the next generation. His eldest daughter Nicole, a business student, adores the whole concept and intends to carry on the GyMEA gourmet dynasty.