



Clockwise from above, chocolate truffle cups; George Magganas and an assistant create some magic; chocolate-lined moulds; serried rows of delight.

Chocolate Dream / Out of misfortune can come good fortune; Nina's Chocolates is living proof. Unexpected redundancy in 1995 meant that George Magganas' retirement plans – to open a boutique chocolate shop – were suddenly put on fast forward. With more than 20 years' experience as a food technologist working with the confectionery industry, and a knowledge of and interest in chocolate-making, George opened Nina's Chocolates in December 1995, initially as a wholesale supplier, in a small workshop in Kirrawee in Sydney's southern suburbs. The artisan business has gone from strength to strength and there are now eight full-time staff assisting George and his wife May.

The complete chocolate-making process is on display in the workshop-cum-shopfront (now located in Gymea, also in Sydney's south). It's not quite Juliet Binoche et al in the French provinces, nor is it Willy Wonker-land, but it's still a chocolate lover's paradise. Molten folds of rich chocolate – dark, milk and white – swirl around stainless steel troughs. The base of Nina's chocolates is imported Belgian couverture in button form, which is then tempered before being employed in any number of ways. Soft centres are passed through chocolate waterfalls; truffles are hand-rolled and hand-piped; there are trays of delicate temptations and sabs of chocolate ready to be broken into man-chable shards. One chocolatier paints orange eyes onto black-and-white penguins, two assistants gently pack mango-flavoured white-chocolate truffles trickled with mango-coloured fondant, while George runs rivers of viscous dark chocolate into moulds and drows oblongs of fudge in a glorious pool of milk chocolate.

Nina's Chocolates is very much a family concern. The name Nina is a hybrid of the first two letters of George's daughters' names: Nicole and Natalie. Nicole, a business student, takes an active interest, and is currently examining e-commerce opportunities for the company. Wholesale sales are still a major part of the business – George supplies many restaurants and five-star hotels, as well as Sydney retail outlets such as House of Chocolate in Bondi and Sweet William in Paddington – but retail sales from the Gymea store now account for 40 per cent of the business. "In festive times, at Easter and Christmas, they queue down the street," says George.

The product range extends to more than 120 different chocolates, from hand-rolled truffles made with fresh cream or butter to fondants and pralines. There's a sense of humour, too, with actual-sized golf balls, oversized freckles (to appeal to the kids), tool kits (with spanners, wrenches and pliers), playing cards and even a full chess set – all made from chocolate. But descriptions are redundant. It's the taste you're here for. A champagne truffle with its rich, buttery centre gets a "Delicious!", while a nutty, creamy praline almost brings tears to the eyes.

"There has to be a 'wow' reaction," says George, "otherwise it's just not chocolate for us."

Text: Sally Webb

Nina's Chocolates, 27 Gymea Bay Rd, Gymea, NSW 2227, tel (02) 9526 6770. See page 38 for a list of good chocolate shops around Australia.