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[CHEF'S SPECIAL]

Bethany Thouin

The Cocoa Tree

IF YOU FREQUENT DOWNTOWN

Franklin, you're probably missing the excellent Cocoa Tree, once a favorite spot on Third Avenue North for artisan truffles, hot chocolate and luscious chocolate fondue. Fortunately for all of us, The Cocoa Tree is back and better than ever after a year's absence, with founder and chocolatier Bethany Thouin's new location next to Germantown Cafe on Fifth Avenue North in Germantown.

Why the relocation to the far end of Nashville? The gifted songwriter-turned-chocolatier had taken a year off to write

her new book, *Chocolate Covered Friendship*, and in anticipation of the birth of her daughter. With both of those projects well in hand, she went looking for her dream shop, discovering it the minute she found the new space. Fans of the old store will recognize the turquoise and pale brown color choices and the hardwood floors, but the configuration is new, including comfy couches, a private room perfect for bridesmaids and baby shower guests sampling chocolate fondue and a spacious area for product display.

Thouin taught herself the intricacies of artisan chocolate. She came to Nashville to be a songwriter, then married and had children. "Life was changing around me—I didn't want to be out late performing, I needed to be home with my kids," she says.

When her husband admitted he'd love to have a shop in downtown Franklin, she decided to learn the chocolatier's art and bring fine chocolate to the area. She's never looked back.

"As a songwriter, I was so focused on what Nashville wanted I never took into account what I wanted," says Thouin. "I

think I really found a voice, and what I wanted to say, with chocolate. Art can be anything. When the thing you create speaks to people, that's art."

Her chocolate creations stretch from her already famous truffles to hot chocolate and fondue to her new drinking chocolate (it's like drinking a chocolate bar). Historically speaking, chocolate fired the public imagination and palate centuries before coffee as the comfort drink of choice, and Thouin hopes to bring a love of rich, liquid chocolate full circle to the future.

"I've always wanted to truly be in Nashville, to have my chocolate be part of the Nashville scene," says Thouin. "Now I look forward to seeing the faces of the city in my shop, and watching them when they taste the chocolate. Hot chocolate, especially, is so comforting, and now you'll have some place to go, drink it, and feel that comforting hug from the inside that is artisan chocolate."

—Stephanie Stewart



Truffles



Bethany Thouin

BROWNIE COOKIES

- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/4 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 ounces bittersweet chocolate, chopped
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 large eggs
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 1/2 tablespoon strong-brewed coffee
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla
- 1/2 cup chocolate chips

Preheat oven to 350°. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper. In a bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, and salt and set aside. Place the chocolate and the butter in a double boiler. (If you don't have a double boiler, you can rig one up by placing a stainless steel bowl on top of a pan of steaming water. Just make sure the bowl doesn't drop all the way into the pan—it shouldn't touch the water below it.) Heat until melted. Remove the chocolate mixture and stir until smooth. Using an electric mixer, beat the eggs just long enough to break up the yolks. Add the sugar, coffee, and vanilla. Beat on high speed for about 10 minutes, until thick. Fold the chocolate mixture into the egg mixture until partially combined. Add the flour mixture to the batter. Fold in the chocolate chips. Use an ice cream scoop to drop the batter onto the baking sheets and bake for 16 to 18 minutes.

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(Taken from Bethany Thouin and Angela Fox's new book *Chocolate Covered Friendship*, published by Thomas Nelson (\$14.99))