

Candyland

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At work, Diane Campbell is like a kid in a candy store -- literally. Along with her husband, Brian, the self-described "candy freak" owns The Candy Store, a Russian Hill boutique that's brimming with more than 300 kinds of candies. From Pop Rocks to double-salt licorice to chocolate-covered gummy bears, there's something for every sweet tooth. The A.V. Club sat down with Diane to talk about vintage candy brands, bacon-studded chocolate bars, and the candy she keeps hidden away behind closed doors.

The A.V. Club: What makes The Candy Store different from other local sweet shops?

Diane Campbell: We specialize in hard-to-find nostalgia candy. We probably have more of it than anyone in the Bay Area. But we want to represent all the worlds of candy -- gummy, sour, chocolate, and international candy as well. We also try to support local artisan candy-makers.

AVC: What made you want to open a candy store in the first place?

DC: I've wanted a candy store since I was a kid. I grew up in Great Neck on Long Island, and there was a candy store in our neighborhood that was also called The Candy Store. It was the center of my universe. I was forbidden candy as a kid, so it was on the sneak. Any time I got money, I went right there.

AVC: When did you decide to open your own shop?

DC: The real serious planning started three years before. But I started selling candy out of my locker when I was 10. I was taking orders at night over the phone, and I'd put Blow Pops and Jolly Ranchers in Ziploc bags. I made a lot of money.

AVC: Do you carry any of your favorite childhood treats?

DC: Mallo Cups, which are milk chocolate and toasted coconut on the outside and marshmallow inside. And Zagnut, a crunchy peanut butter bar coated in toasted coconut. I also loved Zotz, these hard candies with a really sour fizz inside. And I loved candy lipstick.

AVC: What is your favorite item in the store?

DC: Caramel pretzels. It's a box of eight handmade caramels filled with pretzel and covered in dark or milk chocolate and sea salt.

You get salt and sweet and crunchy and soft. It's my desert-island candy without question.

AVC: Who are some of the local candy-makers you carry?

DC: Matzel Toffee by Mollie Lewis. She makes it at the JCC on weekends. It's just matzo crackers covered in chocolate, nuts, and toffee. It's an old family recipe.

AVC: You have quite an array of licorice.

DC: I have 15 kinds of black licorice. Licorice chalk is one of the most popular items in the entire store. It's sugarcoated black licorice, and inside is a licorice cream. It's almost pepperminty. And the double-salt licorice is an addiction for some people.

AVC: Seriously?

DC: It's a degree of addiction I've never experienced before.

AVC: What do you offer chocoholics?

DC: We wanted a nice selection of premium chocolate. We carry 10 bars from Zotter. They're organic and fair trade from Austria. They're very strange flavor combinations you wouldn't think would work. People freak out. Take the "hot chicken ensemble" -- it's like a sabayon -- whipped egg yolks mixed with white chocolate, chili powder, and wine, and covered with milk chocolate. It's spicy. The most popular [Zotter bar] is coffee-plum with caramelized bacon. It's a little on the smoky side.

AVC: Got anything special behind the counter?

DC: I have candy cigarettes, but I don't keep them out. I don't want children to buy them. -- Catherine Nash