



HOME CLASSIFIEDS NJ DIRECTORY HOMES JOBS CARS SHOPPING SUBSCRIBE

The Record BERGEN COUNTY

NEWS SPORTS HEALTH EDUCATION BUSINESS ENTERTAINMENT LIFESTYLES FAMILY

TODAY'S NEWS

- ▶ [N.J. News](#)
- ▶ [Crisis Coverage](#)
- ▶ [Metro](#)
- ▶ [Politics](#)
- ▶ [Nation/World](#)
- ▶ [Business](#)
- ▶ [Obituaries](#)
- ▶ [Education](#)
- ▶ [Health](#)
- ▶ [Technology](#)
- ▶ [Columnists](#)
- ▶ [Editorials](#)
- ▶ [Other Views](#)
- ▶ [Margulies cartoon](#)
- ▶ [The Wire](#)

- ▶ [Bergen County](#)
- ▶ [Passaic County](#)
- ▶ [Morris County](#)
- ▶ [Community](#)
- ▶ [Neighbors](#)

SPORTS

ENTERTAINMENT

CRIME

SPECIAL REPORTS

CONTACT US

IN COMMUNITY

SUBSCRIBE

UNCLASSIFIED

NJ DIRECTORY

Bergenfield candy maker is Marzipan Man

Monday, December 10, 2001

By JAY LEVIN
Staff Writer

Once in a rare while comes a person who does something almost no one else does, makes something almost no one else makes, and shrugs off the suggestion that this qualifies him as special.

Gunter Schott is such a fellow.

Gunter makes marzipan, the almond confection beloved in his native Germany but scarcely known on these shores.

Every day, Gunter sets out before dawn for his nondescript little candy factory on South Washington Avenue in Bergenfield, where almond paste waits to be mixed and stamped and colored into brightly colored fruit shapes, animal shapes, and fish shapes, to name the most popular, and then boxed or wrapped.

His company is called Bergen Marzipan and Chocolate, but the chocolate is almost an afterthought. Marzipan is the 71-year-old's livelihood and love, the reason he spends more than half the hours in a day toiling amid 50-pound sacks of sugar and 50-pound blocks of almond paste.

Such commitment for a product that seldom passes its maker's lips.

"I'm not much of a candy eater," says Gunter, who learned to make marzipan as a kid working in a Stuttgart pastry shop. "But a good piece of cake, I don't mind."

Dainty works of art, marzipan candies -- especially those in fruit shapes -- resemble refrigerator magnets. Marzipan is quite sweet, an acquired



taste. You either love it, or you say, "Gee, thanks, but I'm trying to cut back," and lunge for the nearest Snickers bar.

The confection is centuries old. Its origins are believed to be in the Near East, but Europeans are quick to claim marzipan as their own.

"It's like Columbus," Gunter says. "The Italians say he's Italian, the Spanish say he's Spanish." The Germans are content to let the Italians and the Spaniards slug it out over Columbus, but are adamant that they are the masters of marzipan.

One of those masters, Gunter Schott, brought his craft to America 50 years ago. He was a pastry chef for bakeries in New York and Teaneck before landing at a Hudson County marzipan factory in the 1970s. He struck out on his own in 1987.

Bergen Marzipan and Chocolate -- one of two major domestic marzipan makers, the other being The Multiflex Co. in Wyckoff -- has grown to supply customers as diverse as the Publix supermarket chain in Florida; Delicious Orchards, the specialty foods purveyor in Colts Neck; Bischoff's, the sweet shop in Teaneck; the chocolatier in Manhattan's Plaza Hotel; and German delis here and there.

Don't bother asking Gunter how many customers he has, or how much marzipan he produces. The answers may lurk in those file boxes overflowing with order forms. All Gunter will say is he has about all the customers he wants, and that he picks up new ones when he goes to the annual Philadelphia National Candy, Gift, and Gourmet Show.

"People tell me, wherever they go, they see my marzipan," he says.

A plumpish, balding man of gentle manner and few words, the candy maker is straight out of Central Casting, especially with his white suspended pants, white T-shirt, and discolored white apron.

"I come from a long line of German confectioners," says Anita Mather, a partner in Bischoff's, which has been carrying Gunter Schott's marzipan for years, "and Gunter is a throwback. He makes very good stuff -- everything has to be perfect."

If you're wondering how marzipan comes to be, here goes: Gunter starts with almond paste, which he gets in blocks from his supplier in Brooklyn. The paste, which looks like Italian grating cheese, goes into an industrial mixing machine.

Next to that is a copper kettle, where Gunter cooks granulated sugar and corn syrup. The cooked sugar and syrup is poured into the almond paste, along with powdered confectioners' sugar, enough to raise the almond paste's sugar content from a third to a half. (The added sugar makes the

almond paste more pliable and less oily and extends the marzipan's shelf life.) Then the mixing machine goes to work, kneading the paste.

There are no precise measurements, no recipe to speak of. "I see when I mix, what is needed," Gunter says. "I know by looking and feeling. . . . It's like with everything. You have good auto mechanics, and bad auto mechanics. In the bakery, there are people who are good mixers, and mixers who aren't that good. You either got it, or you don't."

Gunter figures that after so many decades of mixing almond paste, he's got it.

When the paste is the right consistency, it gets fed into the forming machine. Gunter has a variety of molds, which he gets from Germany. One cylindrical mold stamps out six fruit shapes -- orange, apple, peach, plum, pear, and lemon. Another stamps out the most popular shape, strawberry. Other molds produce novelty shapes that are traditional European favorites, such as pigs, fish, and the "moneymaker," a cheeky little marzipan guy with pants rolled down and a gold-colored paper coin inserted . . . well . . . let's not go there.

Remember the "I Love Lucy" episode in which Lucy and Ethel flail away helplessly as chocolates race by on a chocolate factory's conveyor belt? The assembly line at Bergen Marzipan and Chocolate doesn't move quite that fast.

Gunter stands at the head of the forming machine, stoking it with the snowy almond paste. When they're making the six fruit shapes, three people sit on either side of the conveyor belt. The perfect, dimpled little fruit shapes roll off the line, and each person gingerly picks up a candy -- there's an orange person, an apple person, a peach person, and so on -- and places it neatly on a metal tray.

If they can't get to a piece, it falls off the end of the conveyor belt into a box; no one stuffs candies in mouths or down shirts, a la Lucy and Ethel.

Each tray holds 11 rows of marzipan with 18 pieces each, or 198 pieces. It takes a couple of hours for the group to fill 60 trays. That's nearly 12,000 pieces, which, as they say in Deutschland, is a lot of marzipan.

Gunter handles the coloring, just as he handles the mixing. He takes a tray -- say, of lemon-shaped marzipan -- to a battered, stained cabinet and airbrushes the candies with yellow food coloring. Other fruit shapes get spritzed with other colors.

The pieces are boxed by hand. Gunter's most-requested box has 18 marzipan candies -- six strawberry, and two each of orange, apple, peach, plum, pear, and lemon.

The labor intensiveness explains why Gunter spends practically all his waking hours at the Bergenfield factory, where he is assisted by a cadre of part-timers, and sees so little of his Oradell home. This is a particularly busy season for the marzipan man, because many people of German and other European descent like to have marzipan around the house for the holidays. Gunter obliges them by working extra hard, and by setting up a small retail display up front.

"Sometimes during the holidays he's under a bit of stress," says Irmgard Schott, Gunter's wife of 49 years, a dressmaker who helps out in the factory.

"I never had stress in my life," says Gunter, taking exception. "I don't know, maybe because I like to work. All my life, I work long hours. You see, I have no worries. As long as I can pay the bills, that's it.

"Let's put it this way," he goes on. "I could be a long time retired."

But then, who would make the marzipan?

Next week: The Paramus Flying Club

[Copyright](#) © 2001 North Jersey Media Group Inc.
[Copyright infringement notice](#)

