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How Swiss chocolate conquered the world

Mention Switzerland abroad, and the person you're talking to may start dreaming of mouth-watering chocolate. As the symbol of a globally unique tradition, our country is inevitably associated with chocolate. We took a look at the unparalleled development of Swiss chocolatiers. By Alain Wey.

Chocolate: manna from heaven that found ideal conditions on the banks of Swiss rivers and lakes in which to unfold its unique qualities. If there is one thing that represents Switzerland in the eyes of the world, it must be chocolate. Was it fate or coincidence that the abbreviation for Switzerland (CH) and the word "chocolate" start with the same two letters? Such mystical connections will probably remain concealed forever. Yet at first there was nothing to suggest that Swiss chocolatiers were destined to tread a special path. Thanks to the matchless quality of their products, inventive curiosity

and groundbreaking innovations, they honed the manufacture of chocolate to perfection. Today chocolate "made in Switzerland" dominates foreign markets, and export volumes have risen sharply since 2003. We tell the memorable story of Swiss chocolatiers.

The first cocoa bean was brought to Europe from South America in the 16th Century, but it took several hundred years before the first chocolate bar was produced. The delicacy first conquered Europe's royal households in the form of a drink mixed with honey and herbs. It was then discovered by confectioners,

who used it in their creations. In the 18th Century, Italy became a centre of confectionary and chocolate-making, drawing practitioners from around Europe. Many chocolatiers from the Ticino (Val Blenio) and the Grisons who had learnt their trade in Turin, Milan and Venice left home to work abroad in the 19th Century, founding strongly family-oriented manufacturing businesses in Amsterdam, Stockholm, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Strasbourg, Nice, Paris, London, St. Petersburg, Copenhagen and elsewhere. Their know-how flowed back to Switzerland's chocolate pioneers, who gradually began opening the first factories and eventually turned Switzerland into the Number One chocolate nation by the early 20th Century.

One of these pioneers was François-Louis Cailler (1796-1852) from Vevey. He learnt his craft in Turin. Upon his return to Switzerland, he opened a mechanised chocolate factory in



The cocoa from which Swiss chocolate is made comes from South America and Africa.

Corsier-sur-Vevey in 1819. Although commercial success was a long time in coming, the young Cailler created the basis for industrial-scale production (the rotary grater for cocoa beans) and offered sixteen different sorts of chocolate with a variety of additional ingredients, including cinnamon and vanilla. Jacques Foulquier (1799–1865) began manually producing chocolate in Geneva in 1826. His son-in-law and successor, Jean-Samuel Favarger, gave the brand that is still famous today its name. Demand grew, and by 1832 the canton of Vaud alone boasted some 32 manual chocolate-making businesses. The first steamships began operating, bringing yet more consumers. Tourism flourished. During the reign of Queen Victoria, the horror stories that Lord Byron, the poet Shelley and his wife Mary (the author of “Frankenstein”) wrote on Lake Geneva in 1816 attracted the first English tourists.

Having trained as a confectioner under his brother in Berne, Philippe Suchard (1797–1884) from Boudry in the canton of Neuchâtel travelled to the United States in 1824, where he met many Swiss émigrés. In 1826, back in Neuchâtel, he opened a chocolate factory that became famous far beyond the country’s borders. But the pioneering spirit that drove Philippe Suchard was not confined solely to chocolate. It was he who introduced steamships

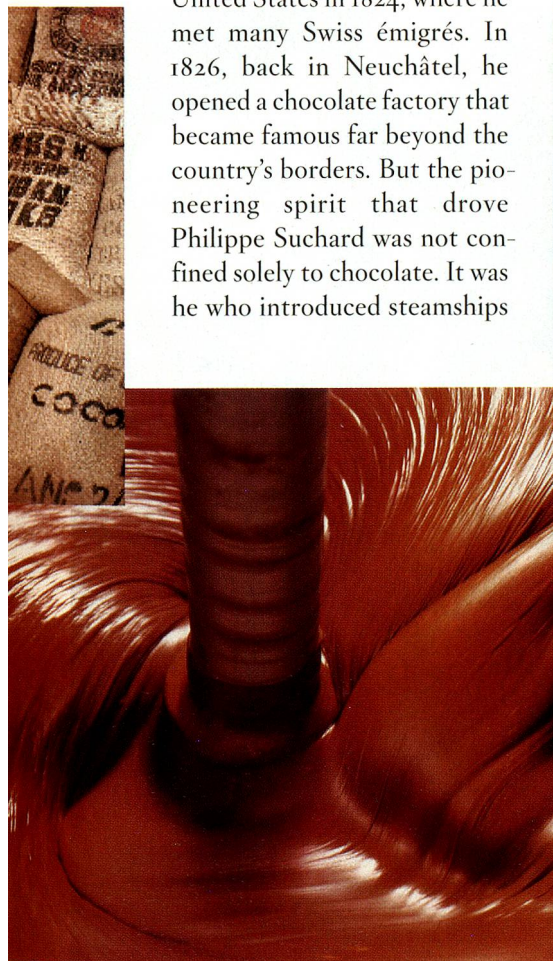
to Lake Neuchâtel and Lake Thun. He was also interested in shipping along the River Rhine, traded in silk and macaroni, and was even involved in iron-ore mining in the US. A look at the industry in 1883 shows that Suchard accounted for 50 per cent of the chocolate produced in Switzerland.

In 1831, Charles Amédée Kohler (1790–1874), a wholesale grocer who also sold cocoa, decided it made more sense to open his own chocolate factory than to continue supplying confectioners with the raw material. Just like Cailler and Suchard, he constantly sought to refine the existing range of chocolates. His most important creation was nut chocolate. The family-run firm trained several famous apprentices, including Rudolf Lindt (in 1872–1875) and Robert Frey (1880–1883).

Daniel Peter (1836–1919), a son-in-law of F.-L. Cailler and a close friend of Henri Nestlé, founded the Peter-Cailler company in 1867. In 1875, he succeeded in mixing cocoa paste with condensed milk, thereby creating the world’s first milk

chocolate, which he dubbed “Gala Peter”. The result was so successful that the entire industry switched to this production method from 1880 onwards. Daniel Peter therefore played a pivotal role in helping Swiss chocolate reach the supremacy it enjoys today. Although chemist and pharmacist Henri Nestlé (1814–1890) did not produce chocolate himself, his company was responsible for the global marketing of Peter’s milk chocolate from 1904.

The first chocolate factory in German-speaking Switzerland opened in 1845. Inspired by the experiments of Cailler and Suchard, Rudolf Sprüngli-Amman (1816–1897) developed a manufacturing process that enabled him to refine chocolate. Aquilino Maestrani (1814–1880) was the most important figure in chocolate-making in eastern Switzerland. Like his father, a chocolatier from Lugano, Maestrani spent time in Lombardy (Milan) and later Nuremberg learning the fine art of chocolate manufacturing. In 1850, he opened a factory in Lucerne, which he then moved to St. Gallen in 1859.



Even today’s industrial production follows the same traditional stages employed by craftsmen.

Rudolf Lindt (1855-1909) opened a chocolate factory in Berne in 1879. A born tinkerer, Lindt constantly improved his mixing and grating machines until he had developed a method for producing a soft-melting chocolate, which he called "chocolat surfín". It was the first chocolate that melted in the mouth, and signalled the birth of modern chocolate. Also in Berne, Jean Tobler (1830-1905) ran a confectionery shop in which he sold his own specialties alongside chocolate made by producers like Lindt. In 1899, he founded the Tobler chocolate factory. We have his son Theodor to thank for inventing Toblerone, the most famous of all Swiss chocolates, in 1908.

The years 1890-1920 were the heyday of Switzerland's chocolate industry, as it earned a reputation far beyond our country's borders. Tourism was booming, and members of the international high society, who spent their holidays in Switzerland, became the world's ambassadors for Swiss chocolate. Rudolf Lindt, for example, aimed his advertising at exclusive girls' finishing schools in western Switzerland, where Europe's *crème de la crème* gathered. This was an era of phenomenal growth rates. From 1888 to 1910, the number of chocolate producers rose from 13 to 23, and the number of people employed by the industry jumped from 528 to 5547. Whereas about 13 tonnes of chocolate were produced in 1905, this had already risen to 40,000 tonnes (three-quarters of which was exported) by 1918. Switzerland thus became something of a chocolate superpower, and by 1912 it had cornered 55 percent of the world's chocolate export market.

Export figures fell during the Depression years of the 1920s and 1930s, and it was only after the end of the Second World War that the Swiss chocolate industry recovered and took off again. In the 1950s, sales were still at around 26,000 tonnes, compared with 160,000 tonnes today. International competition forced the Swiss chocolate industry to streamline its production while at the same time sticking to and further improving the tried-and-tested recipes on which Swiss chocolate had built its excellent reputation.

Given the recent uproar over the change in packaging for Cailler and Frigor chocolates and the subsequent slump in sales, Nestlé eventually had to concede that chocolate consumers are a conservative lot. Nestlé has now announced that Cailler chocolates will be sold in their conventional packaging again from January 2007. Tradition remains a key sales factor in the 21st Century. Innovation and new creations are, of course, welcome, but restraint is advisable. After all, why change a winning formula?

SOME STATISTICS:

- In 2005, sales by the 18 Swiss chocolate manufacturers rose by 8.2% to 160,000 tonnes. Revenues rose by 7.5% over the previous year to CHF 1.466 billion.*
- 57% of total Swiss production was exported in 2005.*
- The 18 companies that make up the Swiss chocolate industry have a combined workforce of 4400.*
- Only 1% of the worldwide cocoa bean harvest ends up in Switzerland.*
- Switzerland has 333 confectionery/cake shops.

(Source: Swiss Association of Pastry Chefs and Confectioners; SKCV: *ChocoSuisse, the Union of Swiss Chocolate Manufacturers)

But the story of Swiss chocolate doesn't end there. If, one day in the future, a space explorer light years from Earth offers an extraterrestrial chocolate, what are the odds that it will be real Swiss chocolate?



The result is chocolate that melts in the mouth like no other.