

A New York chocolate wonderland

Tim Teeman 5 hours ago



I have wanted to visit a chocolate factory ever since I read *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*; and then really wanted to visit a chocolate factory when I saw the Gene Wilder movie (the awful Johnny Depp version almost converted me to fruit for life). Today, in a windblown, industrial part of Brooklyn, my dream was finally fulfilled at the bespoke factory home of Li-Lac Chocolates (li-lacchocolates.com; they do mail order). I had bumped into Li-Lac's owner, Anthony Cirone, and his partner Chris Taylor at a charity event and subsequently become a fan of their delicious chocolates, particularly the milk chocolate Graham crackers and the divine milk chocolate covered mint "patties".

The first surprise today was how small the factory was given it makes chocolate for locations in the West Village and Grand Central Station. The handsome Anthony revealed he and his staff of seven were recovering after Valentine's Day, their "best period of business" since he took over as owner of the 89-year-old business late last year. The main downstairs floor holds a conveyor belt that coats Li-Lac's biscuits or biscuit-cakes in chocolate, first the base then the body before shuddering off the excess. The chocolates then pass through a cooling tunnel before being ready to box up. On another small part of the main floor a man was intricately and carefully making chocolate elephants from moulds: pouring chocolate in to the moulds, banging the moulds to get rid of air pockets, then sluicing off excess chocolate before refrigerating them. There were random trays of cooled fudge and customised chocolate currency.

In the room behind this, copper pans were coated in chocolate and a worker was pouring – oh glory – the white goo that is the main component of a mint pattie into moulds, and upstairs in the packing area three women were arranging truffles into boxes and shaving and making neat large chocolate bunnies in time for Easter. What was surprising was how they manage to get so much chocolate out of the place with so few people, and using such bespoke and small-scale machines - an example of a small business at its most ambitious and lean - and all in a tangible atmosphere of pride in the brand's history, professionalism and friendliness. Li-Lac might not be on a Wonka scale, but it was every bit as magical and cherishable. Naturally I left with a Graham cracker and a mint pattie.

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