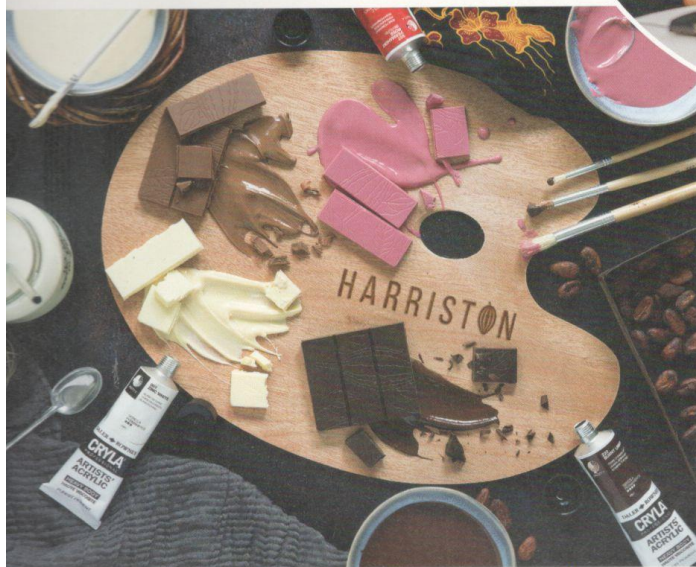


# Chocolate Empire

SISTERS QUEENIE TENG AND TENG WEI TZYU AIM TO SWEETEN THE HEARTS OF MALAYSIANS AND THE WORLD WITH LOCALLY MADE CHOCOLATES.



It was a jarring experience for Queenie Teng when she joined Harriston, a Malaysian brand of chocolates founded by her father. Fresh from a job at a multinational organisation, it quickly became clear that Harriston operated quite differently. The most striking incident for her was when the cleaning lady asked the “big bos” (her father) to get more trash bags as they were running out. She soon realised that her father was essentially involved in every aspect of the company, however minute.

Having been roped in to help with the business, Queenie felt it was time to turn things around and take the company and business to another level. But her father had different ideas.

(Inset) Sisters Wei Tzyu (left) and Queenie have big plans for Harriston, the chocolate brand their father founded

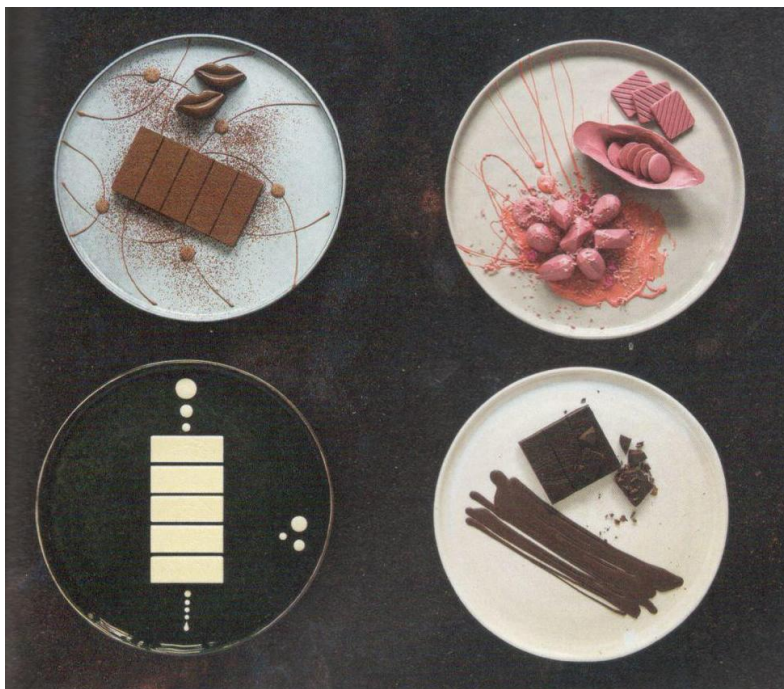
“He saw me as a young and inexperienced girl who didn’t know anything about the business. He wanted me to just observe and learn; and maybe one day, when I was good and ready, I could take over,” explains Queenie. Any ideas and efforts she tried to put forth were met with resistance from her father, a passionate and hands-on man, and a lack of support from the old guards of the company.

Founded in 2005, Harriston is the brainchild of S.C. Teng, one of the first tour guides in Malaysia. Seeing the need for a souvenir which tourists could take back from their visit to Malaysia, he came up with the unusual idea of chocolates.

“Everyone advised against it because Malaysian weather is not ideal for making chocolates, but he was determined and managed to find one supplier who produced chocolates here,” shares Queenie. What started out as a retail business eventually included a manufacturing arm because they had trouble with quality consistency from the supplier. In 2012, TSC Chocolate, the manufacturing division of the company, was established, and they began to produce their own chocolates.

It was around this time when Teng called on Wei Tzyu, his second and youngest daughter who was working in the United States, to return and help with





the manufacturing arm. With a background in supply chain management, it was a great fit for Wei Tzyy and so she agreed. But when she returned, she ended up in the retail side, having to take over from her sister Queenie who had decided to quit after years of being at loggerheads with their father about the company's direction.

"It came to a point where I just wanted a father. I didn't want a father who was also my boss. It was too complicated and challenging drawing the line between the two. Also, I had just had a child and wanted to focus on motherhood," says Queenie.

As Wei Tzyy recalls, the struggle was still strong when she joined the company. "I was about 23 at the time and although I was there to help my father, I wasn't perceived as someone that management could refer to regarding company matters. They still went directly to my father whenever they wanted to discuss anything."

Her father, too, expected her to stay in the background and observe. "I think they saw us as being young. There was a big gap between how the company was run and what my sister and I envisioned for the company," says Wei Tzyy. It was frustrating for the sisters because as the resistance persisted, the market grew more competitive.

Besides trying to convince her father to reform the company's internal operations, Wei Tzyy was also dealing with external challenges, which drove her to convince her sister to return. "The chocolate tourism business is very much a male-dominated industry. They were not too keen to listen to a female, let alone a young woman. They would rather have a discussion with men while having drinks," explains Wei Tzyy.

Breaking the gender stereotype took a lot of work. "I think when we consistently delivered to their expectations in terms

of the quality of products and tip-top service, they slowly turned around. They knew that they were able to rely on us and began to respect us," says Queenie.

The same strategy worked with the old guards in the organisation. Their father came around eventually too and gradually let go of the reins, allowing the sisters to effect the needed change within the company. "It took time. Our father left a strong legacy, so it was not an overnight transformation," shares Queenie.

Ironically, despite their popularity with tourists, they were not so well known within Malaysia. The sisters wanted to change that. Two years ago, they consolidated all the brands of chocolates the company produced, such as Cocoa Boutique and Chocolate Gallery, under the brand Harriston.

"The name Harriston was inspired by my father's favourite member of the Beatles – George Harrison. My dad is also a guitarist and he always admired Harrison and so he decided to adopt his name for the brand. He added the letter 'T' as a tribute to our family name Teng," shares Queenie.

Harriston is now a leading brand in the chocolate tourism business, with outlets in several locations in Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Genting Highlands, where busloads of tourists get off to witness the art of chocolate-making and to taste unique Malaysian flavours infused into chocolates. They have garnered over eight million customers from 80 countries around the world.

The company has taken a new direction, while still maintaining their tourism arm. The brand opened its own chocolaterie at The Linc mall on Jalan Tun Razak, offering high-end chocolates. This year, it collaborated with Chef Frederic Oger, previously the head pastry chef at two Michelin-

(Top) Harriston offers over 150 chocolate variants

(Inset) Cocoa pods

(bottom) Single-origin chocolates from Raub, Titiwangsa and Hulu Selangor





## Humble Beginnings

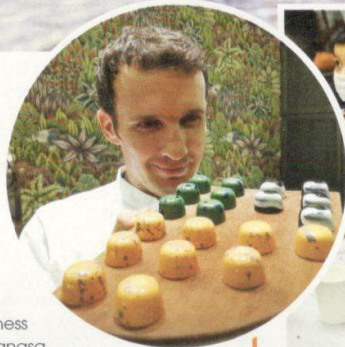
One thing that Harriston does to stand out from other brands is to provide "A Unique Malaysian Experience", as per their tagline. At their outlets, customers are taken on a journey on the art of chocolate-making from cocoa to bar.

star restaurant Michael Caines, to create a unique collection of pralines.

While most of the cocoa is sourced from the Zurich-headquartered Barry Callebaut, the world's leading manufacturer of high quality chocolate and cocoa products, Harriston has also gone into business with local cocoa farmers in Titiwangsa, Raub and Hulu Selangor to create single-origin chocolates. "We want to showcase Malaysian cocoa and put it back on the map as we were once big producers of cocoa," says Wei Tzyy.

To-date, they offer over 150 chocolate products, including unique local flavours such as durian, papaya, curry and *tongkat ali* (a common herbal shrub). This is made possible by their own research and development department, which allows them to come up with innovative flavours. Harriston is said to be the first to have come up with the durian-flavoured and *tongkat ali* chocolates.

One thing that Harriston does to stand out from other brands is to provide "A Unique Malaysian Experience", as per their tagline. At their outlets, customers are taken on a journey on the art of chocolate-making from cocoa to bar. "It is part of our origin story. We explain how chocolates are made, where it comes from and we introduce our products. We let visitors taste the chocolates, we give them a welcome cocoa drink, and there



(from top)  
Visitors to Harriston outlets are in for an experience, from the show-and-tell corner to DIY workshops

(inset)  
Harriston worked with Chef Frederic Oger for a unique collection of pralines



is a show-and-tell corner at the production kitchen. We also have a DIY workshop," shares Wei Tzyy.

The sisters have big plans for Harriston, including opening a second factory by the end of next year. "It is a green factory, so it's environmentally friendly. We are also going to start producing our own chocolate from bean to bar, which allows us to experiment more with flavours," says Wei Tzyy, who is now in charge of operations.

As for Queenie, who takes care of marketing and is behind the modern and charming Harriston packaging, she says they have more ideas to bring Harriston closer to Malaysians next year. Ultimately, their goal is to become a world-renowned chocolate maker from Malaysia. "As our father did, we very much want to promote Malaysian products to the world."

If there is one thing they will never change, it is staying true to their commitment to quality. Both sisters recall fondly something their father had said during a company annual dinner. Referring to mounting competition, he said, "Don't worry about them. We have to remember to always be true to ourselves. While we have to stay competitive, we shouldn't give up on our values and commitment." His words touched the hearts of everyone that night, says Queenie. ●