

Ridgewood Chocolate's Constantine and Rubi Kalpaxis, who sort and roast their cocoa beans and then remove the shell from each one by hand.

Q uence almost a century ago. That would be Aigner Chocolates, a Forest Hills institution that was established in 1930. Opening much more recently, in 2016, is Ridgewood Chocolate, a very different type of shop with an interesting story all its own.

assorted flavors of ice cream.

Meanwhile, over at Ridgewood Chocolates, visitors can enjoy not only specially processed bars of many different varieties but also highly personalized service from the owners, a passionate storyteller named Constantine Kalpaxis and his wife, Rubi, who was the inspiration behind the company.

Sometimes referred to as the neighborhood's best kept secret, the store is little more than a hole-in-the-wall, one that still bears the awning of its prior occupant, a houseware vendor.

While Aigner, like most chocolatiers, takes chocolate and turns it into gorgeous hand-crafted works of art, Ridgewood actually transforms raw cacao beans into chocolate, in what is known as a "bean to bar process."

The beans come from as far away as Ecuador and the Philippines, Rubi's native country.

The process is "painstaking," according to Constantine, as he is known to seemingly everyone.

He and Rubi sort the beans and roast them whole at home (sometimes working until 4 a.m.) one pound at a time.

They then engage in a rare method of production — shelling the beans by hand, unlike most modern machine production. It is seen as the only way to create chocolate in its purest form, resulting in chocolate that is rich and smooth and truer to the cocoa bean's natural profile, according to the store's website.

In fact, Constantine claims to be "the only one in the world that regularly manufactures hand-shelled chocolate." He takes pride in "going back to the human scale of making things in a little store."


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The end result is what Constantine calls “magic stomach chocolate,” which, he claims, if eaten properly (one small amount at a sitting), can help reduce stress, reduce stomach pain, establish regularity and “put the kibosh on hunger pangs.”

So, how did the couple come to be in the chocolate business in the first place? When Rubi immigrated to the United States, she expected to find the same quality chocolate that she enjoyed back home. Alas, she was disappointed to discover that most choices here involved highly refined sugary treats.

She purchased a pound of beans from an online company and proceeded to make chocolate using traditional techniques. Thus, the idea for a new business was born. 

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