

A Gear with a Sweet Tooth

Gear manufacturers typically use plastic, steel or other metals to make their gears, but Andrew Shotts made his first gears out of sugar and chocolate.

These materials are more familiar to Shotts. As a pastry chef, he has worked in the kitchens of the Russian Tea Room, La Côte Basque and the ocean liner Queen Elizabeth 2. In 2001, he worked with two colleagues to create sugar and chocolate gears in that year's National Pastry Team Championship.

Considered the premier event of the pastry world, the annual pastry championship requires contestants to create a chocolate showpiece, a sugar showpiece, cakes, plated desserts, frozen desserts and petit fours surrounding a theme. International teams vie for a grand prize of \$50,000.

While racking their brains for a vision of how to best illustrate the 2001 competition's Hollywood theme, the chefs on Team Shotts were inspired by 1930s actor Charlie Chaplin and decided to design an entry to honor his performance in the movie *Modern Times*.

Nothing symbolized the message of *Modern Times* better than a gear, says Shotts.

"It had to be a gear because, during (the) Depression, there was so much more an emphasis on the mechanical, rather than on humans," he says.

Shotts and his colleagues, Patrice Caillot and Rémy Fünfrock, constructed two gears. One gear was the team's sugar showpiece, the other was its chocolate showpiece.

"We were depicting an old movie reel with the sugar showpiece," says Shotts. "It's the same size film, 16 mm, that was used when the movie was shot. The white parts are supposed to be film wheels and the entire format of that gear is representative of that old over-and-under format of the 1936 movie camera."

The chocolate showpiece looks much like the sugar one, but there are some subtle differences between them. At the bottom of the chocolate showpiece, for example, are fanlike cutouts resembling a shutter. Both creations show gears curving on either side to illustrate the mechanical nature of factory work during the Depression.

Since the creators were trained in culinary arts rather than in manufacturing, their planning for the contest was extensive. They spent three months learning about machinery, designing a template and mixing the ingredients. Shotts, Fünfrock and Caillot began their creative process at the library, researching gears in periodicals and trade journals.

Once they became comfortable with the construction of a gear, they tried to devise the showpieces out of cardboard. They saved the cardboard template to a disk and sent it to an engineer in Atlanta, who then cut a mold to the exact specifications. Once they had this mold back from the engineer, they were able to pour the chocolate into it.

Each showpiece took *eight* hours to bake.

This year, Shotts and his partners are too busy with their day jobs to participate in the National Pastry Team Championship 2002 Contest. Shotts works in New York as a corporate pastry chef for Guittard Chocolate Co. and launches a new line of seasonal bonbons every three months.

Caillot works as executive pastry chef at New York's St. Regis Hotel, specializing in desserts, and Fünfrock explores new desserts in his role as executive pastry chef at Café Boulud in New York.

Though their gears were probably better tasting than those made in factories, the creators opted to throw out the showpieces after the competition. ⦿



More than three months of effort went into making this gear by an unusual coupling of culinary and engineering talent.



Vintage cinema inspired the creation of this gear, which is meant to represent the importance of machinery in 1930s American labor. This gear is reminiscent of gears used in an antique movie camera with 16 mm film.

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