

## Cream or caramel? Confectioners help decipher what's in that box of chocolates

# Candy code

By **TENLEY WOODMAN**

**N**othing sours a Valentine's Day sweet tooth like biting into an orange creme when you were craving a caramel.

Nowadays, many assorted chocolate boxes come with a map to help decipher nougats from truffles. But some confectioners still rely on old-school code — that pretty swirl pattern atop the sweets, known in the industry as strings.

"If it is a raspberry creme it is a letter 'R.' Most (strings) coincide with the letters for the flavor," said Mary Ann Nagle, whose grandfather opened Phillips Candy House in Dorchester in 1925.

You'll never have to squeeze, or sample-bite, again.

"It's a handmade addition. We've been doing it since we started. Most handmade chocolates do it," said Nagle, the shop's manager.

Judy Hilliard McCarthy, owner of Hilliard's House of Candy in North Easton, said every candy store has its own method of stringing, but candy shapes tend to be universal.

"If it is round, chances are it has a soft center. Anything that is chewy or hard has to be cut, so it would

have sharper edges. There are a few exceptions in there," said Hilliard McCarthy.

Tim Brown, pastry chef for Aroa Fine Chocolate in the South End, learned how to string in France.

"Unfortunately, there is going to be limitations to it. There are only so many shapes that show up on the chocolate," said Brown.

Instead of letters, Brown opts for shapes, such as diagonal lines, squares and triangles to denote his different creations.

North Shore mainstay Harbor Sweets breaks with tradition in its line of hand-molded chocolates.

"All of our chocolates have a very clear identity," said Phyllis LeBlanc, president and owner of the Salem-based company.

Harbor Sweets' specialties, such as the Sweet Sloop, a sail-shaped morsel, and Marblehead Mints, flavored round disks, are unmistakable trademarks for those familiar with the brand.

United Kingdom-based **Hotel Chocolat**, which has

stores on Newbury Street and at the Mall at Chestnut Hill, opts for a dramatic touch in its Valentine's assortment.

Rounded chocolate hearts are colored with red, pink and purple hues.

"The colors are pretty intuitive in that red is most often chili, pink and pinky red denotes a red fruit flavor, like strawberry, raspberry or even black currant," said Nicki Doggart, CEO of American operations.

Other giveaways in Hotel Chocolat's collection include yellow markings for lemon and gingers flavors, and pink stripes for a raspberry-mousse-filled sweet.

Traditional confectioners such as Russell Stover and Whitman's Sampler have long abandoned individual identifiers. Instead, shape is the easiest way to navigate through a tray, according to Mark Sesler, head of marketing for Russell Stover Candies Inc.

"If it is a square or rectangle it is going to be some kind of a chewy nougat or caramel. If it is round or oval it is going to be a soft center, like a creme or truffle. Generally, you cannot tell from looking at it if a round piece is going to be strawberry or coconut," said Sesler.

— twoodman@bostonherald.com





**THE RIGHT PICK:** Russell Stover chocolates, below, come in different shapes. Hershey's, right, offers a map.





**SWEET JOB:**  
Diana Delacruz  
of Phillips  
Candy House in  
Dorchester  
decorates the  
tops of choco-  
lates to denote  
their flavor.

