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Eng 102

24 Apr. 2014

Chocolate, Coffee, and Johnny Depp

As I entered the quaint candy shop on 217 Allen Street, the aroma of sweet, melting chocolate wafted through my nostrils. A warm greeting from a man in the back echoed, “Hello! How may I help you?” Little did he know I was in for more than a sweet treat.

Andria’s Candies, located in downtown Owensboro, Kentucky, is adorned with green, purple, and black hues on the left side of the building by abstract murals of the infamous actor Johnny Depp and other figures, such as a monkey (if you look close enough). The tropical cocoa flower is also painted within the mural to tie in with the shop’s specialty: chocolate. Not your run-of-the-mill chocolate, mind you. Andria’s Candies chocolate variety is as unique as the Hollywood star it memorializes.

As I told David Atkinson, the owner of the chocolate shop, of my reasons for stopping by, he gladly set aside his work to fill me in on the scoop. “To be honest, I had no input on what was gonna go on the wall. I went to a lot of meetings, and I paid for the materials,” Atkinson admitted. It turns out, Monty Helm, the Associate Professor of Art at the Owensboro Community and Technical College was the brilliant mind behind the undertaking of the mural conception.

“The title of the mural is Candiculture,” Helm says. The particular portrait of Depp was inspired from his movies “Chocolat” (2000) in which Depp portrays a gypsy who helps a chocolate shop owner, and “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory” (2005), where viewers watch Depp as the infamous Willy Wonka, the ultimate candy maker. The inspiration of Depp’s role as Willy Wonka is evident in the mural as he is painted wearing the iconic top hat of the chocolate fanatic.

The minimalistic shop emanates a homey, vintage feel that automatically makes sweet-tooth shop-goers feel at peace. There is a humming anticipation in my nerves as I know I will soon leave the shop with candy in hand, soon satisfied tummy. The roots of the shop trace back to the Grecian originator, Thomas Andriakos, explaining the name “Andria’s.” Atkinson is the second owner of the shop in its entire history, and he is proud of keeping the store’s originality. “Thomas (Andriakos) started the business in 1959 and I took over in 1991,” Atkinson tells me. Not a whole lot was lost as for the characteristics of the recipes from Andriakos to Atkinson, he feels. “I have improved the bourbon ball recipe a little bit,” Atkinson shares. His opinion seems to be shared by most of Andria’s customers, as the bourbon ball specialty seems to be the driving factor that keeps the shop afloat. The recipe to those unique bourbon balls will have to remain a coveted secret, as it is the store’s trademark.

The renowned box containing the special bourbon balls was well thought-out by Atkinson. On it is the title “KENTUCKY BOURBON CHOCOLATES” plated in gold text, atop of a Kentucky outline which is affronted by a wagon pulled by mules. Atkinson vied for mules over horses because he feels like they are more agricultural and represent Kentucky roots in a more symbolic manner. An afterthought of the box’s design was to put “made in Owensboro,” also in gold font, at the bottom of the box. “You wouldn’t believe how much that sells this for us,” says Atkinson when talking about putting the significant three words on the bourbon ball box.

The bourbon ball trademark has helped the shop so much that Atkinson is considering having a mural constructed of the box’s decal. I follow Atkinson outside so he can easily iterate his thoughts on the mural to me. He would leave Johnny Depp on the wall (of course), but he is considering re-painting the “mad baby” faces.

Atkinson has other plans for the shop’s exterior décor. He expresses his desire to paint the front of the shop with a color scheme of dark and milk chocolates. David Atkinson, the wizard of candy making in Owensboro, not only makes chocolate, but thinks in chocolate colors. Could he be more epic? He wishes to bring out his “crazy side” by incorporating gold leaf into the color scheme, which will really help the shop stand out to pedestrians.

As we finish admiring and pondering additions to the mural, we head back into the shop. Casual tunes of The Lumineers iconic “Ho Hey” song reverberate subtly in the background as I scan the precious individualized chocolates. I hear the peanut butter cups are divine, but unfortunately the chocolate maker was out of them as Easter orders were his first priority. “We are usually a lot busier than this during this time of year,” Atkinson says. But when I reassure them there is always a tomorrow, he optimistically responds (with a slight chuckle),”Yes, there *is* tomorrow.”

The mural has created buzz for Andria’s. Atkinson tells me that almost everyone who stops in asks about the piece, and who can blame them? It’s quite the attraction. Business has slightly boomed due to the construction of Smothers Park downtown, which brings in the common mother figure with a couple of kids to each get a piece of candy.

I finally decide on the chocolate turtle and the chocolate toffee, hoping the toffee would be comparable to a Heath Bar. Comparable is an understatement. Andria’s Candies toffee far surpasses any toffee I have ever tried, and if you don’t believe me, you should go try it yourself. At Andria’s Candies, the chocolate is as savory as the experience.