

## **Gary Guittard** **President & CEO – Guittard Chocolate Company**

When Gary Guittard talks about chocolate, it is with a passion and purpose that is infectious. For him, chocolate is not just one of life’s most delightful culinary treats, it is his life – a life to which he was born as a fourth generation member of a family that has been making chocolate in America since 1868. Some of his fondest childhood memories are of exploring his grandfather’s chocolate factory on San Francisco’s Embarcadero, marveling at the equipment, savoring the heady aroma and indulging in the occasional sample. He quickly became enchanted with the process that transforms small bitter beans into American’s most craved food substance and makes one’s clothes smell like chocolate all day.

That enchantment remains with him today as president and CEO of one of the oldest family owned and operated chocolate producers in the world. “I love the actual aspects of manufacturing – inspecting the hundreds of 140 pound burlap sacks of cacao beans arriving from plantations all over the world, tasting the warm roasted cacao nibs, controlling the molten chocolate so it drips really slowly, folds into bars of chocolate, and is perfectly molded with a beautiful sheen. I get excited about this every day of my life,” says Guittard.

“From growing beans and harvesting them to drying them, every precise element of the manufacturing process is critical. The process is so delicate. That’s why even though we’re a family business, we adhere to bacteriological and environmental requirements twice as rigid as those the government requires. We have a very advanced in-house microbiological lab that works in tandem with our QC team to deliver on top-quality products.”

For the last 145 years, Guittard Chocolate Company has made high quality chocolate by melding old world small-batch processing with modern techniques. It has been on the vanguard of the industry in other areas as well, most notably, by developing products to meet specific customers’ needs. Guittard adds, “That’s another thing I love about this business, working with people to come up with a chocolate to help them accomplish a specific flavor in their final confectionery or pastry product. It’s a hallmark of our company and the thing that distinguishes us, because we have the flexibility and the expertise to customize products that the big companies don’t have and we can move quickly.”

Guittard is in constant motion, ever in search of the best chocolate to suit the desires of his customers. With eyes closed, concentrating intently on the flavor notes of the latest Guittard creation, Guittard is completely focused. The next moment, he’s discussing sustainable agriculture and the future of cocoa crops on the Ivory Coast and beyond. Soon after, he’s up and striding purposefully to the plant, a 100,000 square foot facility adjacent to his office.

After graduating from the University of Denver with a major in psychology and a minor in religion, he recalls, “My father suggested I get some experience in the business before joining Guittard. So I worked with a food broker for a couple of years to understand grocery distribution and then spent time in marketing and sales for the bakery supply industry.”

He joined the family firm in 1975, to work side-by-side with his brother Jay, who oversaw the wholesale business and his father Horace A. Guittard, the company chairman. Noting that home cooks were becoming increasingly sophisticated in their demands for quality baking chocolate, Guittard created the company’s first line of chocolate chips for the home baker. In 1989, due to the untimely deaths of his father and brother, Guittard began running the company with his family of employees, many of whom had been there for 20+ years and remain at Guittard’s side to this day.

Guittard’s exacting standards are evident in the thought that goes into the sourcing and blending in every Guittard chocolate product. From working with their growers in the field to the care and craft taken with the beans when they arrive in Burlingame, Guittard’s lifelong approach to chocolate making is “quality from the ground up.”

Under his guidance, Guittard Chocolate Company has continued to thrive as the fifth generation of the Guittard family joins the company. The business his great-grandfather Etienne Guittard started with a few bags of cocoa beans on the San Francisco waterfront now produces some of the world’s most sophisticated chocolate and employs some 150 people in the process.

The introduction in April 2000 of the Collection Etienne line, made from the world’s most select cocoa beans using the time-honored vintage methods he remembered that were employed by his great grandfather was a return to the company’s roots. It was truly the culmination of his almost lifelong experience at Guittard Chocolate Company, coupled with his expertise in chocolate and his desire to return to small-batch manufacturing to insure the finest chocolate experience. In 2013, he introduced a major brand revamp and new products including Collection Etienne Baking Bars.

Gary Guittard is an industry leader in his global efforts to promote sustainability of the environment of the cocoa growing regions and the well being of cocoa workers. He serves on the board of the World Cocoa Foundation (WCF)—a public-private member group of stakeholders in cocoa. He sounded the alarm in 2007 with a grass roots group and petition called, “Don’t Mess with Our Chocolate,” when it became apparent that industrial confectioners were petitioning the F.D. A. to replace cocoa butter with cheaper fats and still call the resulting product “chocolate.” His petition made international news, rallied opposing forces and succeeded in its mission. More recently, he has devoted his expertise and energy to preserving heirloom fine flavor cacao beans through his involvement with the Heirloom Cacao Preservation group.

Guittard is committed to the chocolate he produces, in no small part because of the effect it has on the world around him. Ask the San Francisco native and father of two what continues to fuel that devotion and he'll tell you it's the fact that "Everyone loves chocolate and it makes people smile...what could be better than that?"

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