

Charlotte's Candy Couple



Eat chocolate. Help others. Performing a good deed has never tasted this sweet.

For rational scientists, Joal Fischer and Deborah Langsam sure leave a sweet trail of glittering pixie dust in their wake. Take the time the couple vacationed in Paris, France. In the basement of the Ritz Hotel, they immersed themselves in a pastry class and were soon whipping up sugar-spun delicacies and delights worthy of the finest bakery on the *Champs Elysées*.

Joal Fischer and Deborah Langsam understand that making chocolate is part science, part art, and completely delicious.

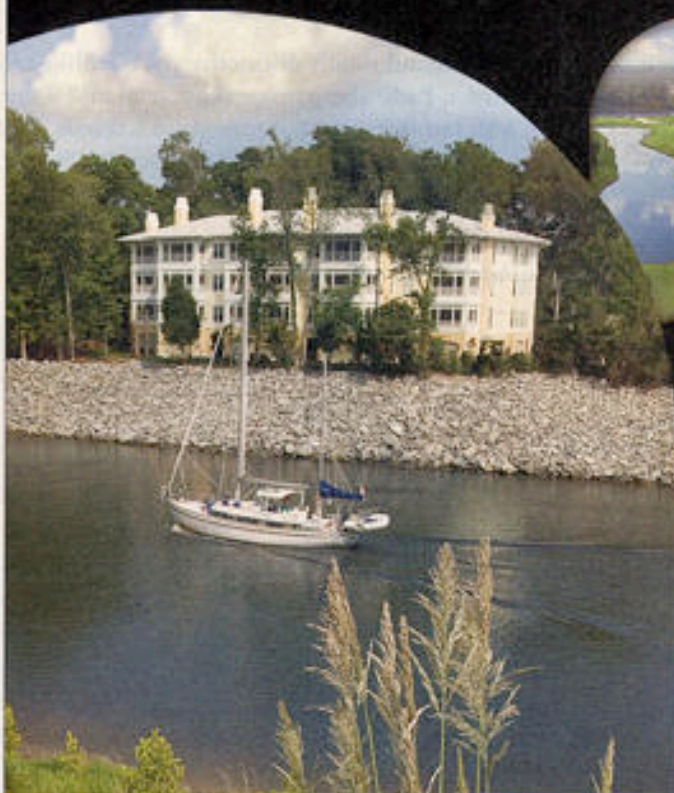
But what to do with the 18 pièces de résistance they created during their weeklong tutorial? Simple, the couple decided. Let them eat cake.

"They became a vehicle for us to get to know people," Joal says. "We would go back to a waitress who was nice the day before and bring her this cake with her name on it and a note in French."

"We both really enjoyed making the cakes more than eating them," adds Joal, his eyes twinkling. "Well," sweet-toothed Deborah says drily, "that might be an exaggeration. But how much cake can you eat in one week?"

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PHOTOGRAPH BY ADAM BARNES

Spoonfuls of candy make everything better at Barking Dog Chocolatiers.

Doctors and Delicacies

The husband and wife reminisce about the Tour de Cake giveaway, which began their culinary journey, as they bustle around their well-equipped kitchen and adjoining workroom. The gleaming space is in their home in the Dilworth area of Charlotte, where they produce delectable goods for their business, Barking Dog Chocolatiers. "You get into the rhythm of dipping or working with the chocolate, and it's very meditative," Joal says as he hovers over a vat of mesmerizing, swirling chocolate.

He laughingly refers to himself as the "Grand Poo-Bah of Barking Dog," while Deborah answers to "Lord High Everything Else." Before those ridiculous Gilbert & Sullivan-inspired titles, Joal was known as Dr. Fischer, a developmental pediatrician in private practice; and Deborah was Dr. Langsam, a Ph.D.-holding botanist on the faculty at The University of North Carolina at Charlotte. ▶

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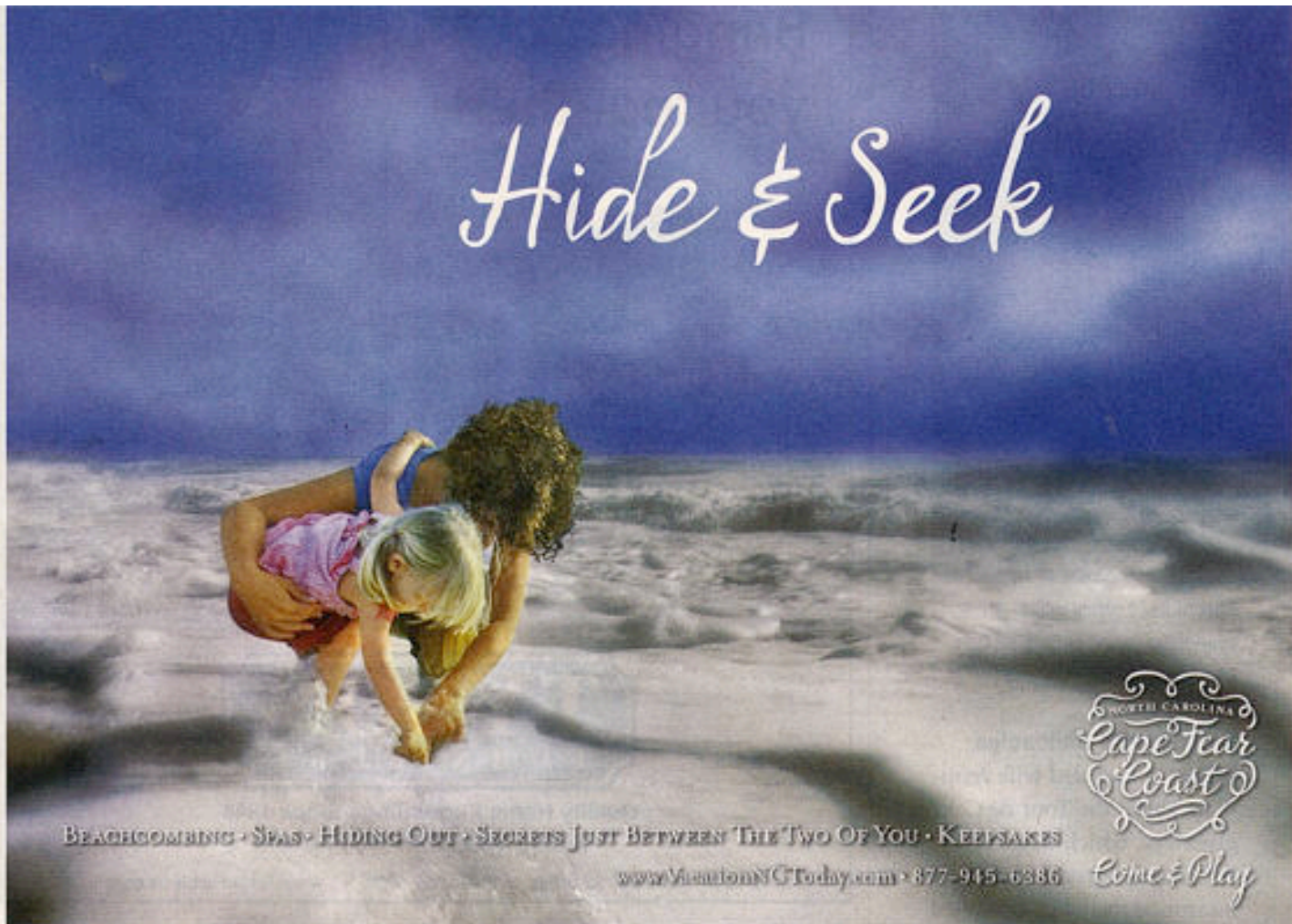
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“You get into the rhythm of dipping or working with the chocolate, and it’s very meditative.”

Joal Fischer

Nowadays the two design and handcraft delicious chocolates, specialty barks, petits fours, truffles, dipped fruit, and other specialties. The fancy sweets are available online and at Bonterra Dining & Wine Room, a local restaurant.

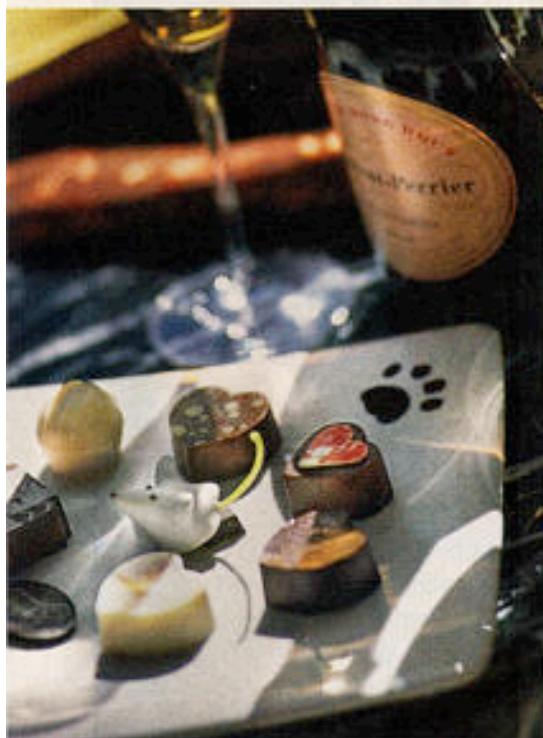
In their typical pixie dust manner, Joal and Deborah do good while pursuing their passion. All of the proceeds from the dessert boxes and platters benefit SupportWorks, a support group clearinghouse Joal founded in 1989.

Basking in Basics

By the time Joal and Debbie returned home from France, Joal had developed a passion for food. He was eager to jump in with both feet, but first, he had to learn to chop vegetables.

“Debbie is a very good cook, and I wanted to catch up,” he says with a shrug. He approached local chef Bruce Schlernitzauer, who “gave me a pile of carrots and said, ‘Here is a knife, and here is how you hold it,’” Joal recalls. “I spent the afternoon cutting carrots. All of a sudden, I was working as a volunteer prep cook for about 20 hours a week and having a wonderful time in this fancy restaurant.” When the pastry chef needed help, the unpaid apprentice happily dipped himself into the world of sugar.

Hooked, he and Deborah devoted more time to refining their skills. In addition to the Ritz and another



Artisan candies made from quality French, Belgium, Swiss, and American chocolate tempt even the most disciplined.

Parisian school, "We've taken chocolate and pastry lessons in Montreal and Chicago," says Deborah. "And we worked with a chocolatier outside of Philadelphia."

We just liked the idea of playing with chocolate," she continues. "We wanted to make chocolates for family and friends around the holidays. Then this just got way out of control."

Barking Up the Right Tree

Joal recalls the moment they came up with the perfect, quirky name for their business. "A pet that is no longer with us would bark when she was hungry," he says. "Suddenly, we both looked at each other and said, 'That's it!'"

That eureka moment might suggest the couple shares the same affinity for all things chocolate. Not so, says Deborah. "Joal likes chocolate," his

"Sometimes, your mistakes turn out to be your windfalls," says Deborah, about the ins and outs of candy making.

chocoholic wife says, "but he underestimates the power of it." She, however, understands perfectly the addictive pull of the sweet stuff.

"I used to say to Joal, 'I get nervous if there's no chocolate in the house.'" She grins and adds, "Now I'm never nervous." **NANCY DORMAN-HICKSON**



Bite Into Barking Dog

Go ahead, and indulge. All of the profits from sales of Barking Dog Chocolatiers specialty boxes and platters are donated to SupportWorks, which helps people find and form support groups, as well as research medical and other information. For a list of the constantly changing inventory, visit www.barkingdogchocolatiers.org, or sample the sweets at Bonterra Dining & Wine Room in Charlotte. For more information about SupportWorks, visit www.supportworks.org, or call (704) 331-9500.

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