

# Brandettes

ADVENTURES IN BRANDING

Interviews November 17, 2016

## DEVELOPING DELICIOUS- INSIDE THE BOX @ THE INVISIBLE CHEF



The Invisible Chef is a captivating brand, one that is far bigger than just sugar and flour, in fact. Sure, it's tempting to be distracted by ooey gooey this and ahhh inspiring that, but the real story of this brand starts with empowerment. The Invisible Chef, started by two visionary entrepreneurs, Jill McCauley and Terry Howard, offers cleverly creative baking kits that transform any of us into baking experts.

The variety of products offered by The Invisible Chef is astounding, really, allowing all home chefs to toggle between cupcakes to crumbles and beer bread, with ease. Each experience or mix leaves one feeling victorious, and certainly on par with the creative bakers that fuel our Pinterest envy, all for less than \$10.00. In one of the most insightful and heartfelt interviews on Brandettes, McCauley and Howard give us a truly behind the

scenes look at their trend spotting process, flavor development and the developments that have catapulted their brand to the powerhouse it is today.

Enter for a chance to win the entire Donuts & Dots Collection from The Invisible Chef (details below)!



**Terry & Jill, we always love hearing how brands were born. Can you give us some insight into generating the idea for The Invisible Chef and how you built the brand?**

At the onset of The Invisible Chef, we came together because of a mutual background in the food industry. We met at a regional gift mart in Columbus, OH, both of us were working in different showrooms.

We started by working on every aspect of the company together, and as we grew, each of us fell into our own niche within the company. Jill had a bit more of a sales and manufacturing background. Terry had a background in sales and food and fell more into the recipe/formula development. Over time, our responsibilities just naturally fell into place. We still work on a lot of things together, but we have more defined job responsibilities now.

In reality, it has been a slow and steady process to build the company. It's only within the last few years that we were both able to concentrate solely on The Invisible Chef. So, while we are ten years old, in many ways we are still a new company.

We both believe in providing our customers with time saving, helpful baking mixes that still allow them to have a hand in the baking process and enjoy the peace of mind that they are using the very best ingredients as if they were starting from scratch. Add ins can be your choice- skim milk versus whole milk or being able to use the type of oil you prefer in baking. It's so important for customers to be able to have a choice in their final

product. We like to offer classic stand-by flavors like our Lemon Poppy Seed Coffee & Tea Cakes, but also include some innovative flavor combinations not everyone would put together like our Chocolate, Cinnamon & Ancho Chile Brownie Cake.



### **Can you shed some light on the branding & packaging inspiration for The Invisible Chef? Has it evolved over time?**

We started The Invisible Chef with only eight items; a few Coffee & Tea Cakes and two bread mixes. We have evolved so much since the initial launch. Not long into our start up, we realized we needed a designer and artist group that could take our vision and turn it into our ideal packaging. We have the help of a great duo that takes our photos, designs our packaging and builds our website- we have all grown together to the place we are today.

The Invisible Chef has 50 items now across a broad range of products, encompassing all baking categories. Private label programs with leading retailers in the industry have really influenced us and the direction we are heading. It has been a fast and furious decade of building The Invisible Chef!



### **How important has photography and social media sites like Instagram & Pinterest been for the brand?**

About four years ago, it became apparent to us that photography sells food! We planned an offsite photoshoot in California to concentrate solely on taking beautiful lifestyle

shots, featuring several recipes, all using The Invisible Chef mixes. Using these shots and a newly re-designed website, we added the tagline "Think Outside The Box", the idea being our boxed mixes can be used as a launching point to create delicious baked goods. It's like speed scratch baking-the consumer makes it beautiful and makes it their own. Instagram and Pinterest have obviously become more and more important, and while we have a small start in both, it is the next area that we need to build on.



### **How does The Invisible Chef identify and address trends in the food world?**

The market place is always changing and evolving, so we have to stay on top of trends. Reading industry trade magazines and national food magazines is imperative. Many new trends start as complicated desserts in restaurants, and then are picked up and featured in national magazines. Finally, food manufacturers find ways to convert these ideas to mixes that make it easier for consumers to bake at home. A perfect example is the cupcake trend of a few years ago. Stars started posting pictures of their favorite cupcakes and cupcakeries and the trend quickly became huge. Cupcake kits and baking mixes to make you own cupcakes started popping up everywhere in the retail environment. The trend has settled down some now. Cupcakes are still selling, but are not quite as trendy as a year or so ago.

The newest trend to hit (we believe) are donuts. And these are not just plain glazed donuts anymore, bakeries are finding fun toppings and ingredients to add in. Knowing this helped us identify the need for donut kits, and our new Donuts & Dots Collection is the result. The Collection features three kits- Almond Cappuccino, Chocolate Banana and Cherry Crumble. All of the kits feature Donut & Dots mixes, glazes, and special toppings. The Almond Cappuccino, for example, features roasted cocoa nibs to top the cappuccino glaze.



## **Tell us about your FUN partnership with Jelly Belly and how it came to be.**

The FUN part of the partnership has been developing these great kits using Jelly Belly iconic flavors. The response has been so overwhelming; it really has made the entire project a terrific experience.

Jelly Belly works with a licensing company that vets out all new potential licensees. The Invisible Chef was approached after being seen in a national store that carries another one of our brands, JAZ Gourmet Food Co. Our boutique approach to baking mixes appealed to Jelly Belly. We submitted in-line samples from The Invisible Chef and, after a round of tasting and discussions, we were selected to move forward as the exclusive licensee for Jelly Belly baking mixes.

Jelly Belly flavor profiles are a natural fit for baking mixes, and the product itself is perfect for decorating baked items. Jelly Belly suggests recipes featuring their own flavors that we plan to incorporate into baking kits. For example, the Chocolate Covered Cherry Cupcake Baking Kit will include the Jelly Belly flavors Very Cherry Frosting and Chocolate Pudding Cupcake, together becoming a Chocolate Covered Cherry Cupcake. Creating mixes from these iconic combinations is a natural fit. Baking mix plans include Cupcake Kits, Cookie Kits, Swirl Cakes, Donut Kits, etc. One of the most fun collections we have planned is a series of Celebration Happy Birthday Kits. These will include the cupcake mix, frosting & a packet of Happy Birthday Jelly Belly Beans. We have lots of fun, colorful packaging ideas and concepts for this collection, which will hit the market soon.

The 2016 Holiday Collection is in stores now, and includes Candy Cane Swirl Cakes, a Hot Chocolate Donut Kit and French Vanilla Thumbprint Cookies (below).



**We know this is a tough one, but for newbies just trying out The Invisible Chef for the first time, what are three go-to kits that you'd recommend starting out with?**

1. **Almond Crème Coffee & Tea Cake**– great with the Caramelized Almond Topping Chef's Tip on the side of the box, or use this same mix to make the Almond Brownie Marble Cake, a featured recipe on our website.
2. **Brewer's Choice Beer Bread**– a very versatile mix that can be made as-is for a warm crusty loaf of bread, or again, we have crowd pleaser recipes online to make as an Italian Flat Bread or as a Cinnamon Pull Apart Bread. One mix, so many great options.
3. **French Breakfast Puffs**- a runaway hit since it was launched last fall. Bake right from the box for a wonderful cinnamon sugar topped muffin, or bake as our Jelly Filled French Breakfast Puffs for an extra special version of this mix.



Enter for a chance to win The Invisible Chef's entire Donuts & Dots Collection (one each of three complete kits pictured at top)- Almond Cappuccino, Chocolate Banana and Cherry Crumble, plus a signature IChef Spatula!

**To enter, leave a comment on this post telling us which social media channels or blogs you follow for your foodie inspiration. Entries must be posted by Wednesday, November 30th, 2016 at 11:59 p.m. PST, and one lucky winner will be chosen at random.\* Good luck!**

*\*This giveaway is open to U.S. residents only. Please do not leave your email or web address in the body of the comment, only in the allotted boxes. \$35.80 USD total value for the winner. Winner will be contacted, privately, via email, once the contest closes.*