

Discover a Fountain of Youthful Delights With a Chocolate Cascade at Bellagio

1/28/2005

Jean-Philippe Patisserie Introduces a First-of-Its-Kind Free-Standing Fountain of Melted Chocolate

PRNewswire-FirstCall

LAS VEGAS

From far down Bellagio's promenade in the luxurious new Spa Tower, a mesmerizing figure entices curious guests with visual splendor and aromatic wafts: jutting out into the main corridor like the prow of a ship is a glass-enclosed, floor-to-ceiling chocolate fountain emerging from Jean-Philippe Patisserie. Displaying a spectacular series of melted chocolate cascades, this first-of-its-kind spectacle is the tallest chocolate fountain in the world.

Designed by award-winning Executive Pastry Chef Jean-Philippe Maury and Norwood and Antonia Oliver Design Associates, Inc., the fountain took a year and a half in planning and design. The result is a genius work of kinetic sculpture and a daring feat of engineering. Standing 27-feet tall, the masterpiece circulates more than 2,100 pounds of melted dark, milk and white chocolate at a rate of 120 quarts per minute.

"I've been creating sculptures out of chocolate for years, but exploring the particular properties of melted chocolate has been fascinating," said Executive Pastry Chef Jean-Philippe Maury. "Each of the three types of chocolate behave very differently, and we had to be aware of this in the design. It's been a wonderful challenge!"

The visual impact of the fountain is as compelling as its chocolate is appetizing: six spouts in the ceiling initiate the lyrical descent of rich dark, velvety milk and glistening white chocolate streams through a maze of 25 suspended glass vessels. Cast in 1/2-inch thick, rough-hewn aqua glass and held in position by anchoring cables, each vessel was built to precise size, shape and design by Montreal artist Michel Mailhot. Some oblong, some rounded, each irregular, the vessels hover mobile-like to capture and coax the paths of free-falling liquid chocolate.

Three rivers of dark, two of milk and one of white twist and swirl from vessel to vessel, flood across then spill down to the next carefully positioned receptacle. The colored streams and vessels are staggered, creating a mosaic effect

in earthy shades of cocoa, gleaming viscous surfaces and refracted light. Having finished their acrobatic tumble down the tiers of this colossal chandelier, each rivulet funnels into hidden melting tanks, recollects and begins the journey once more.

Surrounding all this glory is a protective, multi-faceted cloak of 300-pound glass panels that rise in a funnel shape as the fountain expands toward the ceiling.

"We've made glass a central design component of both the fountain and the Patisserie," said Designer Norwood Oliver. "Glass maximizes the visibility of chocolate's color and the multiple cascades as they flow from vessel to vessel. Glass also was an ideal medium to take the fountain's physical presentation to another level -- sculpture."

Built under Oliver and Chef Maury's guidance by Perfect Equipements of Montreal, the fountain's power plant is an elaborate system of pipes, pumps and valves located beneath the floor of the Patisserie. There, three tanks of chocolate -- dark, milk and white -- melt all 2,100 pounds to 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Six pumps join forces to transport the molten delight to the top of the fountain through two-inch diameter, stainless-steel pipes hidden within the walls of the shop. Surrounding each pipe is an additional three-inch pipe through which flows hot oil to keep the chocolate thinned as it journeys up the wall to make its entrance. More than 500 feet of these double pipes circulate chocolate 24 hours a day. From the tank room below to the pipes above, the fountain's full height is 27-feet, yet only 14-feet is visible within the shop.

"The scope of this team's vision and their expertise are nothing short of genius," said Randy Morton, vice president of hotel operations at Bellagio. "Jean-Philippe Patisserie will become a sightseeing destination in itself and is a stellar addition to Bellagio's collection of elegant amenities. This one-of-a-kind fountain, Chef Maury's exquisite confections and the refined elegance of the decor and packaging all combine to make an experience our guests will never forget."

SOURCE: MGM MIRAGE

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