

Over the years he has won many awards and prizes and although many see him as the best and most modern pâtissier in Belgium, he sees it differently: “You know, there is a major difference between restaurant pâtissiers and confis-seurs. Having a restaurant gives you more opportunities to think out of the box, the media comes to you. It is much more difficult for a confiseur. I was lucky with the media, the reason why I was called the best very quickly. But I don’t see myself that way at all. Innovative, yes, I would say so. With my new ideas of presentations I hope to get people thinking.”

# The inspiration

## Roger van Damme

## Explosive

“Pâtisserie has to get a new approach,” Roger says. “By using a whole new structure of food, I can see and use products totally differently. Each item on a dish will be individually presented. If you eat things separately, you can get a much stronger taste. But what is important for me, is that everything I present has the same structure.” All crèmes have the same texture, the crunchy items have a different taste, but still the same interpretation and bite. This way you won’t get confused by a lot of differences and you can concentrate on the taste. “Who says that pâtisserie has to be the way it is? Why do we have to present everything

as a little tart or prepare it as a mousse or a bavarois? The taste sensation in your mouth is all that counts. Because of the individual items, the guest can make the combination himself. It will all come to an explosion in the mouth!” It is characteristic for Roger that none of his dishes are excessive: “A dish should carry its own decoration.” Roger has repeated it a few times: for him structure is the most important. “I use the thermo mixer a lot. This makes it more refined, and enhances the taste. It is Gunther Van Essche from pâtisserie Del Rey, who takes it even further when it comes to structure. I see him as the best pâtissier of Belgium. He has one disadvantage, his creations have to be sold as separate items





and have to be kept well in the showcase. I have more possibilities as I present everything on a plate. Therefore I can use dry ingredients. But his structures are an inspiration for me.” Everything on the plate has to have a function, and correlate with the dish. The new way of presenting doesn’t have to be a mint leaf or a raspberry. “I do what I like. The guest is not totally ready for this approach. I can use it as part of a menu, but not as a separate item with coffee. That doesn’t work.”

## Modesty

What we have noticed before and even today, is the fact that Roger presents himself in a very modest and open way. No hint of arrogance here. “In Holland I won the dessert trophy of the year and last year my dessert menu was chosen as the best of the country. This is the reason why I have to keep coming up with new ideas. However, I am not alone and am very open with my colleagues. I have a number of people who I help behind the scenes and also people who inspire and help me. Together we can create new and beautiful concepts.” His greatest inspiration? He already mentioned Gunter Van Essche but second is Alberto Adrià, the reason why Roger often travels to Spain. But that doesn’t mean he copies these inspiring colleagues. “I use the inspiration to develop my own style. Of course, I was very lucky that I was an apprentice at El Bulli and that our relationship there is superb. Therefore we already had melon caviar many years ago. However, I don’t see Spain as sacred, I only use 10% of it on my menu. I do read an awful lot and use what is relevant. Since I am very involved in photography, I approach my desserts differently which has led to new trends.” Roger would like to see higher standards in pâtisserie. “There is not a country in the world that has seen so much evolution in pâtisserie as Belgium. There are many top pâtissiers in our country, who are better than me, they just were not so lucky getting publicity.”



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## Brown

### *Crunchy Chocolate*

**Ingredients:** 500 g fondant, 250 g glucose, 250 g isomalt, 100 g cocoa powder.

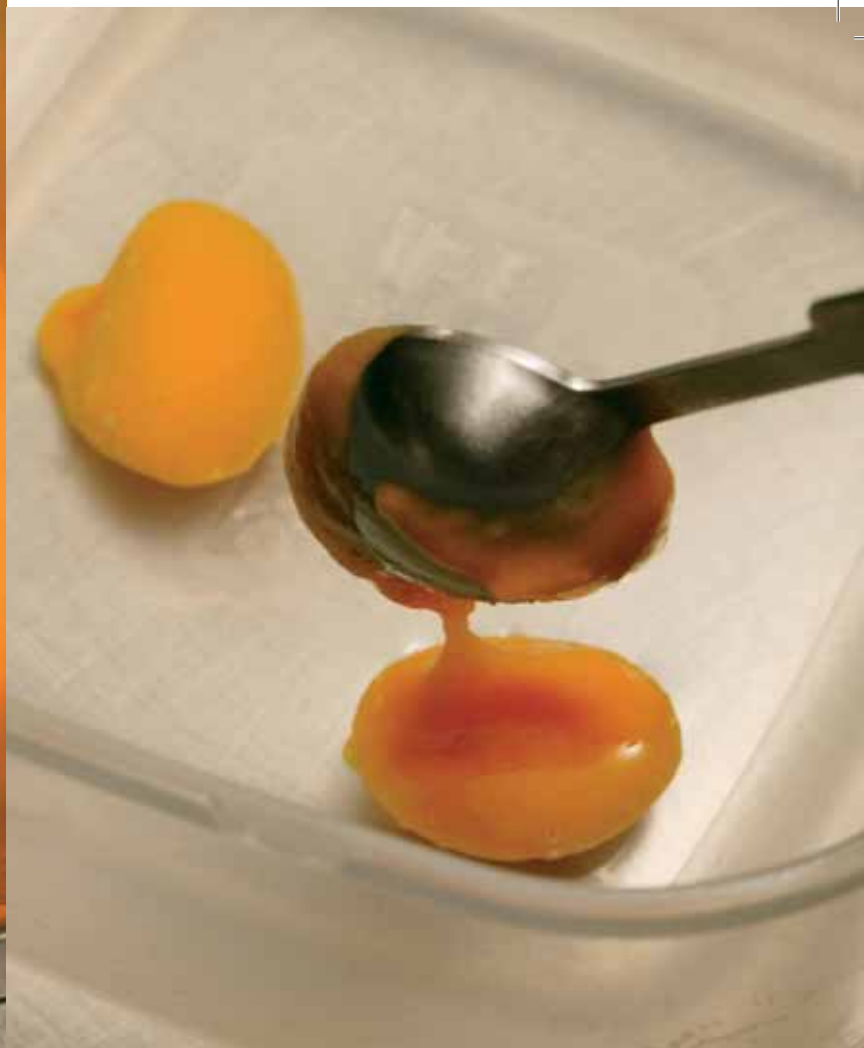
Mix 100 g fondant with the glucose, heat to 160°C/320°F; add isomalt and the rest of the fondant and heat to 140°C/285°F. Add the cocoa powder, cool and grind to a powder in the thermo mixer. Sprinkle the powder on a silpat and bake in a pre-heated oven at 170°C/338°F for 80 seconds. Take out of the oven and let sit until it becomes crunchy and break it in pieces. This crunch is extremely well suited to garnish desserts.

### *Cocoa Powder*

**Ingredients:** 80 g dark chocolate, 30 g cocoa powder, 30 g sugar, 100 g cream, 300 g water.

Mix the cocoa powder with the sugar and mix the cream with the water. Combine both mixtures together, bring to a boil and dissolve the chocolate in it. Put in a Frix beaker and freeze. Swirl the powder around when necessary and keep in the freezer. This powder can serve as a nice gadget on a dessert or part of a dessert. For example, El Bulli serves this powder as a combination with lime and wasabi. Once it has had enough twirls, simply keep it in the freezer.





## Yellow

### *Mango yolk*

*Ingredients:* 1 liter mangopuree, 8 g algin, 1 litre water, 5 g calcic.

Using a hand blender, mix part of the puree with the algin. Add the rest of the puree and mix well. Mix the water with the calcic. Using a ladle, spoon the mango puree in the calcium bath. Leave the yolk in there for 160 seconds and then rinse with clear water. This “yolk” technique is often copied. Roger shows us how it really should be done. It is important to know that not every coulis can be used for this. It is extremely important to know the degree of acidity. The coulis should also not be too thin. Therefore Roger always uses coulis of Boiron that meets all the requirements. The yolk can be seen as a liquid jelly on a tart for instance. There will be a lot more of these applications in the future.





### *Mango crunch*

*Ingredients:* 450 g mango puree, 120 g icing sugar, 75 g isomaltose, 15 g glucose.

Mix all the ingredients in a thermo mixer of 80°C/175°F. Spread the mixture on a silpat and bake at 120°C/250°F for 100 seconds. This again is a garnish. The crunch is best kept in a dry and cool place. To avoid stickiness, it is advisable to put a little box of silica-gel in the container. This absorbs any moisture.



## White

### *Cellophane of sugar*

Heat sugar pearls to 160°C/320°F and cool a bit. Dip a small iron pipe in the sugar pearls and blow thin cellophane out of it. With some practice it will be possible to use this technique for wrapping products in “cellophane”. Make sure that the products don’t contain a lot of moisture. For example, you can use it to wrap nuts.

### *Sugar pastilles*

**Ingredients:** sugar pearls, hazelnut oil, plastic pipettes.

Heat the sugar pearls to 160°C/320°F and let cool. Suck the hazelnut oil up in the pipette and form a little ball of sugar around it. Squeeze the oil into the sugar and pinch it carefully so the pastille will close. This application is ideal to give an extra boost of taste to a dish. You can also use other oils, but no liquids to do this.