

# From Fund-raiser to Chocolatier

Craving a change, Casey Hickey left her office job for a sweet new career.



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## SING A LONG DIPPING

fork, Casey Hickey lowers a truffle called Sweet Heat—made with mango, passion fruit, and habanero chilies—into a pot of molten dark chocolate. The result will be “fruity, with a kick,” she says. “I’m fascinated by flavor and what I can do with it.”

Eleven years ago, Hickey’s work wasn’t so delicious. As director of development for a San Francisco–based medical society, she spent her days in a windowless office. “I was proud of what I did,” she says, “but my self-expression was limited to fund-raising proposals and spreadsheets.” Hickey spent her free time reading cookbooks; when she baked a wedding cake for a friend, a chef attending the reception was so wowed that she suggested Hickey rethink her career.

In 2003 Hickey finally took the advice. After cashing in an IRA, she enrolled in a pastry program at Paris’s Le Cordon Bleu, where she was especially enamored of the lessons on chocolate. “I had never known it could be such an art form,” she says.

Back in the Bay Area, she landed a job at a chocolate-themed café—but set her sights on a bigger goal: “I wanted my own business,” she says. So in 2010, she and her husband moved across the country with their two sons to open a chocolate shop in Charlotte, North Carolina, not far from Hickey’s hometown of Greensboro. Today customers who buy her Twenty Degrees Chocolates (a reference to the latitude where cacao trees grow) remark on the artistic flair of her creations, which have included a fresh take on crème brûlée

(caramelized white chocolate embellished with gold filigree) and chai truffles imprinted with a design resembling Indian fabric.

Hickey is inspired by everything from her travels to her favorite films (a bonbon topped with a bowling pin is her homage to *The Big Lebowski*) and loves making recommendations. For those with adventurous palates,

she suggests chocolates perfumed with basil; if someone wants a romantic gift, she reaches for Champagne truffles. “My work used to be something you could sum up on a sheet of paper,” says Hickey. “Now what I create is tangible—it’s a way for people to indulge themselves or express their love. That’s very satisfying.” —JESSICA STOCKTON CLANCY

